Polyhedron®

NEWSZINE

MAY

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RPGA® NETWORK

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Conventions

3-Rivers Game Fest '94, May 27-30
Pittsburgh, PA
This convention at the Pittsburgh Airport Marriott Hotel features many RPGA® Network events, including first-run AD&D® game and Shadowrun tournaments, a Puffing Billy Tournament, many board games and miniatures. Pre-reg weekend badges are $17.95. Write to Andon Unlimited, P.O. Box 3100, Kent, OH 44240. Or call: (800) 529-EXPO (outside Ohio) or (216) 673-2117 (Ohio and international).

Sili*Con '94, May 27-30
Norfolk, VA
This con features guests Dean Stockwell, Armin Shimmerman, Leslie Fish, and others. The convention's theme is Virtual Reality, with panels hosted by leaders in the industry. Events include sf/fantasy films, anime, filk & folk singing, computer game demos, a dealer's room, and role-playing. Registration is $30 before April 30, $35 at the door. Write: Sili*Con at 444 N. Armistead St. #103, Alexandria, VA 22312. Or call Roy at (703) 642-2572.

Illinicon '94, June 3-5
Urbana, IL
Held at Hendrick House dormitory on the campus of the University of Illinois, this con features the AD&D game, Shadowrun, Vampire, BattleTech, Star Fleet Battles, Eurorails, and other games including Network-sanctioned tournaments. Don't miss the open gaming, movie lounge, game auction, miniature painting contest, prizes, and dealers. Free parking, nightly accommodations at $12/night. Free events on Friday night. Admission is $5 for the weekend, and $3 covers all of the events. GMs needed. For more information, send a SASE to: Urbana Gaming House, 904 West Green, Box 1801, Urbana, IL 61801.

Glathricon X, June 10-12
Evansville, IN
The Network's oldest club invites you to the Executive Inn for several first-run Network events including AD&D game Paragon, Grandmasters, Masters, Cancer Benefit, and Feature, a Marvel Super Heroes Master and Feature, Shadowrun, Chill, Paranoia, Torg, Dark Conspiracy, and more! Meet special guests Jean Rabe and Val Valusek. Call: (812) 453-9232, or send a SASE to Glathricon X, P.O. Box 15414, Evansville, IN 47716.

Wyvercon '94, June 17-19
Mount Vernon, WA
This convention will be held at the Skagit County Fair Grounds. Featured events include a Network AD&D game tournament, a LaserTag arena, and a Saturday night dance. Other events include BattleTech, Boffer Chess, Lost Souls, 24-hour open gaming, martial arts demos, miniatures contest, costume contest, dealers' room, and more. Camping and RV spaces are available. Pre-registration through May 31 is $15 for the weekend. On-site registration is $20 for the weekend. Send registration or inquiries to: Skagit Valley Gamers Association/ Wyvercon '94, P.O. Box 2325, Mount Vernon, WA 98273, or call Todd or Larianne: (206) 855-0197.

Capitalcon X, June 18-19
Springfield, IL
Springfield Gamers Association presents this convention held in the Prairie Capital Convention Center. Over 80 events, including Vampire, Werewolf, Chill, RPGA Network events including single- and multi-round Shadowrun, RAVENLOFT setting, and Marvel Super Heroes. Many board games, miniature events, two special BattleTech tournaments, a miniature painting contest, a huge dealers' area, game demos from TSR and FASA, and a used games auction. All this for only $10—no game fees! Write: John Holtz, 400 E. Jefferson, Springfield, IL, 62701.

QuinCon IX, July 15-17
Quincy, IL
A fantastic mix of role-playing, miniature games, and board games featuring RPGA Network tournaments, special guests, and a Saturday auction. Nearly 70 events, featuring both new games and classic favorites. No game fees. For more information, send a SASE to QUINCON IX, c/o Mark Hoskins, 1181 Pratt Street, Barry, IL 62312. Admission fees are $5 for one day or $12 for the weekend.

DragonCon, July 15-17
Atlanta, GA
This multi-media science-fiction and fantasy gaming convention features more than 250 hours of role-playing, miniature, board, and computer gaming tournaments including a $1,000 AD&D Game Team Tournament and a $1,000 Tournament of Champions board game event. Additional events include a 24-hour open gaming room, live role-playing events, and consignment game auctions. Pre-reg: $35 before March 15, $40 before June 15, $45 at the door, children six and under admitted free. For more information, call the 24-hour info/fax line at (404) 925-2813, or call the DragonCon office at (404) 925-0115. Or write: DragonCon '94, P.O. Box 47696, Atlanta, GA 30362-0696. Three-day registration is also available using Visa, MC, or AMEX by calling Ticketmaster at (404) 249-6400 through July 15.

Grand Game Con, July 15-17
Grand Rapids, MI
Held at the American Legion Post #179 at 2327 Wilson SW, this convention includes dealers and these game events: RPGA Network tournaments, the AD&D game, Amber, GURPS, Star Wars, Space Marines, Cyberpunk, Vampire, Call of Cthulhu, Torg, Warhammer, Shadowrun, Napoleonics, Rail Barons, Starfleet Battles, and more. Open at 8:30 a.m., events at 9:00. Pre-registration before May 31 is $6 for one day, $12 for both. Admission at the door is $7 per day. For more information contact: John Edelman, 321 Carlton SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506. Judges contact: Leon Gibbons, 13910 Olin Lakes Road, Sparta, MI 49345.

July's Joust II, July 23-24
UNAM University, Mexico
This convention will be held at the Science Faculty at UNAM University. We will offer AD&D game and Call of Cthulhu tournaments, as well as costume, miniatures, and art contests. Pre-registration is required for the tournaments. For further information and registration, write to: Adrian Gomez, Vicente Equia 50, Col. Tacubaya, Mexico D.F. 11850, Mexico. Or call in Mexico: (915) 516-75-50. From the US, call: (011525) 516-75-50.

GEN CON® Game Fair, August 18-21
Milwaukee, WI
Join more than 20,000 gamers at the world's largest multi-media game fair featuring four days of events. The festivities include computer, military, role-playing, strategy, miniatures, virtual reality, video, arcade, and board games—more than 1,000 events in all. GEN CON is also the place to find RPGA Network events. Everything from multi-round events to Living City tournaments. More than 20 Network events will be available, with terrific prizes given out to the winners. The game fair also features a million-dollar art show, dozens of celebrities, a costume contest, Star Trek guests, comic-book artists, Japanimation, a 200-booth exhibit hall, and $10,000 in prize giveaways. For more information, write to: GEN CON Game Fair, P. O. Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

About the Cover

George Verbanic shows us a more poignant depiction of the fantasy priest with this month's striking cover.

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Polyhedron® NEWSZINE

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Notes from HQ

"No enemy but winter and rough weather"

It should have been an eight-hour drive. But we left at eight in the morning and arrived after ten at night. Fortunately, Egyptian Campaign was easily worth being stranded for a few hours as winter fastened us to the road among a halted procession of motorists.

The convention has grown from a single game day to a 379-gamer event on the campus of Illinois State University in Carbondale, and the college atmosphere makes for a pleasant, relaxing change of pace from the more urban conventions. This year, events ranged from AD&D® game tournaments to *Warhammer 40K* skirmishes on very cool table-top terrain. And of course there were the ever-present *Magic: The Gathering* duels, some organized, many more spontaneous. It was a great time, and I'm especially grateful to Joe Nadler for the invitation and hospitality, and to Amber Spillars for judging above and beyond the call of duty while my traveling party was suffering the abuses of winter.

The waning season was more gentle this past weekend, so the trip to Concentric at the Ramada hotel near O'Hare airport was much easier. Con organizer Joe Miller reports that turn-out was tremendous for a first-time convention, topping 800. Evon Furst (who also deserves an above-and-beyond thanks for making lunch for hungry judges!) and Vicki Miller certainly had their work cut out for them marshalling the many eager Living City players and judges for the visual adventure, The Living Dungeon. Each player could enter the complex (made of the delightful dioramas you may have seen at the GEN CON® Game Fair) up to three times—but because of the adventure design, the "boxes" produced a different encounter each time. The visual aspect of this event is very exciting and can only inspire more visual events in future.

Quotation Winners

Maybe the quote was too easy, or maybe the membership is very well read (I'll believe the latter). But the little challenge made in issue #91 drew quite a few responses! Barb Young, editor of DUNGEON® Magazine, tried to take unfair advantage of her early copy of the Newszine by dropping a little note in my office, but we disqualified her for omitting her full name and address. You must be sneakier, Barb!

Our first legitimate response was received via internet, at our GEnie account. Unfortunately, we can't locate the saved file! If you wrote that note, drop us another line the same way and be sure to include your name and U.S. mailing address. We've got a prize set aside for you.

But the first card to arrive at HQ came from David E. Smith, who explains, "Lucky for me, I just happened to be reading Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as homework (II.2.195)." Thanks for everyone who responded, especially those who sent in nice cards (Ryan Staske, Gwendolyn Kestrel, Steve Kydd, Sean Kelley, Gary Watkins, and Kerry Jordan—who drew us a nice picture in lieu of a postcard). Receiving your notes was such a pleasure that we'll have to do it again! Identify the quotation at the top of the page. This time, the first correct response from each different country will net a nifty prize, as will the first correct e-mail response to our internet address (TSR.RPGA@GENIE.GEIS.COM).

Uninhabited!

Our Vast Caverns contest from issue #91 drew some wonderful entries. Among them were adventures and settings by William Clumm, Timothy Emrick, Glenn Fines, Larry Lawrence, Alan Michell, Scott Miles, Sean Murphy, Alexander Roy, Justin Somma, and Russel Bither-Terry. It was a difficult decision, and we discussed the best entries at length before determining the winner. Honorable mentions must go to Alexander Roy and Scott Miles, but our final, all-around favorite is "The Hidden River," by Timothy Emrick. Congratulations, Tim!

This time, dwarves and drow elves were the most common inhabitants of the caverns, but each entry had something to set it off from all the rest. All but one were written for the AD&D game, but we did receive a GAMMA WORLD® game entry and were glad to see it! Remember, these maps could be from any sort of setting. We'd especially like to see some AMAZING ENGINE® game variations for some of these contests, though any system or setting is fair game.

Watch upcoming issues for Tim's version of the Vast Caverns, as well as Brian's next "Uninhabited" installment.

Ciao,

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Elminster's Everwinking Eye

Clandestine Company

by Ed Greenwood

Secret societies in the Realms? Oh, aye—lots of 'em . . . what's that? Tell *ye about them? Well, lad, if I did that, they'd not be secret, would they now?*
—Mirt "the Moneylender" of Waterdeep, said to a young adventurer, Year of the Turret

Elminster's revelations about power struggles in Sembia and elsewhere made me curious about the current doings of mysterious, behind-the-scenes power groups in the Realms—such as the Zhentarim, the Red Wizards of Thay, The Cult of the Dragon, and the Harpers. The Old Mage told me I was much better off not knowing about such things. But then he added that if I were determined to live a short, tumultuous life of danger, I'd best know of some more "secret societies" of Faerun, the power groups not yet widely known.

The Broken Sword

One of these groups is of great interest to soldiers and adventurers across Faerun—or would be, if they'd heard of it. Based in old, crumbling, forgotten keeps and caverns across the North, it's a band of men, orcs, and half-orcs called the Broken Sword.

The Broken Sword believe life was better before the rise of humankind, when all warring sentient races existed more or less in balance, skirmishing constantly but never rising to great strength, or risking extermination.

"The Green Time" is what Sworders call that half-mythical state of affairs before humans gained numbers, magic, and a wide reach; before drow came to rule vast stretches of the Underdark through their numbers and ruthless battle-efficiency; before the pride and power of the elves and dwarves were broken—and before orcs became hunted and hated by all.

The members of the Broken Sword are dedicated to reclaiming the Green Time. They leave elves and dwarves, whom they call "the Fallen Fools," largely alone, except to aid those elements among both races who hate and fight against human rule. In return, most elves and dwarves who are aware of the activities of the Broken Sword turn a blind eye, warning no one and raising no hand against Broken Sword deeds.

Most Broken Sword activities consist of stealthy night- and storm-time raids on lone mages of power (to gain magic items), rich human merchants (to gain funds), and soldiers, watchmen, and authorities everywhere (to encourage unrest, fear, and lawlessness). Broken Sword agents keep watch on the movements of chartered adventuring groups, because they love to act when their deeds can be blamed on nearby adventurers. Some human Broken Sword members and informants even run outfitting and weapons shops that cater to mercenaries and adventurers.

The Broken Sword works to blame mercenary warriors for their own bloody night-work. Whenever possible, they frame local rulers and guardsmen for crimes and promote religious strife by stealing altar services, despoiling temples, and murdering clergy. They leave triumphant god-symbols and slogans behind at the crime scenes to make their vile deeds appear as the work of rival clergy or believers.

Some Broken Sword members are very adroit, but most (particularly the orcs of shorter temper and greater bloodlust) are clumsy and are often caught in the act. Magically-assisted interrogation has thus revealed this group's existence to many in the Realms, with predictable results. The Harpers of Berdusk have recently ordered all members to regard the eradication of the Broken Sword as a matter of utmost importance.

Only a few important Broken Sword leaders have been identified thus far: Faerndar Branhorn, a man of Cormyrean noble bastard birth, who lairs somewhere in the Stonelands (with possible Zhentarim support), leading a band of at least forty men and half-orcs; Uelaugg Blood-hand, an orc chieftan who heads a roving band in the vicinity of the Spiderhaunt Woods; Jortran Harbarb of Amn, now thought to be active in the deep woods of Tethyr; and "Swordhilt," an as-yet-unmasked agent highly placed in Waterdeep, who provides monies for Sword activities, and hires outlaws and fell folk of the Underdark in Skullport to do Broken Sword work as far afield as Suzail and Westgate.

Through mind-reading of a captive Sworder, one of the chief targets of the Broken Sword is known to be Cormyr. The Sworders believe if the Forest-Kingdom is destroyed, unrest can swiftly spread over all Sembia and the Dalelands. The Sworders can promoting this strife by reinforcing existing trade rivalries and the self-interest of greedy merchants. For this to succeed, the Cult of the Dragon, Hillsfar, and powerful mages of the region (such as Elminster of Shadowdale) must be manipulated into open war with Mulmaster—to prevent that warlike city from imposing tyrannical rule on the entire region.

The opening steps in the work against Cormyr involve slaying key nobles and arranging affairs so that the deaths resemble the work of rival noble families. If this is done with the sponsorship and support of Sembian interests, it will set feelings against the Land of Merchants and prevent it from sending any aid to Azoun if war breaks out in Cormyr. At the same time, orcish agents are to foment the spread of disease in Marsember, and a third group will dress their men as Purple Dragons and storm one of the parties at the Palace in Suzail, putting as many nobles to the sword as possible. Sworder wizards will be on hand to *teleport* away all the false Purple Dragons, dead or alive, to a ship standing offshore.

Finally, all Sworders will spread rumors of the corruption of Azoun's court, his personal exploitation of young women of his realm, and his plans quietly to have killed all members of certain noble families who have offended him. The rumor will be supported by the disappearances and slaughter of certain members of those families, whose wealth the Broken Sword will appropriate.

The Knights of the Storm

This band of nobles and outlaw nobles is few in number and very secretive. Their name comes from their leader, the Storm Knight, a man who always conceals his identity behind full plate armor of gleaming blue metal. This suit

is an *armor of lightnings*, a +2 magical armor that alters to fit whoever dons it, never rusts, and is proof against all electrical attacks, and able to redirect them as same-strength bolts or *chain lightning* arcs against targets of the wearer's choice, within 100'. The Storm Knight is thought by many to be a noble of Tethyr, who left that country to save his own skin during the current strife, and who has plans to return to seize its throne someday. Others think him one of the outlawed noble families of Waterdeep, or even Gondegal, the "Lost King" of Cormyr.

Whoever he is, the Storm Knight has access to magic and agents who are either dopplegangers or shape-shifting mages. They circulate through all kingdoms of Faerun, whispering to those nobles who are most exploited and disenchanted, promising them aid in gaining revenge, or in "setting things right," in their local grudges and feuds. In this manner, the Storm Knight has gathered exiled, bored, or bitter young nobles to his cause. Some of them have taken to living in hiding, striking against kings and nobles as their leader directs. These Knights often ride into battle in full plate mail, wearing the badge of an upright right-hand gauntlet curled into a fist, around which lightnings arc.

The Lords' Alliance, and now the Harpers, have become aware of the existence of this band in the wake of the slaughter of Robilar Roaringhorn (a fun-loving, roving youth of that Waterdhavian noble family) and of attempts on the lives of most of the nobles in the Daggerford area. Reports have come from Leilon and Neverwinter of Storm Knight activities there, and attacks on nobles in the Moonshaes may be the work of this group.

The Knights of the Storm have been known to hire adventurers to work bloodshed, approaching those who've suffered at the hands of local rulers or authorities. These missions usually involve raiding the castles and lodges of nobles. The Knights also have money enough to hire unwitting folk to perform small acts, such as driving a wagon from one town to another, or picking up armor from a smithy at a certain time. In fact, this seemingly innocent work furthers or provides cover for Storm Knight activities. A ballad that romanticizes "the Knight who comes riding in the storm" has recently begun to make the rounds of the Sword Coast minstrels.

The Masters of the Cowl

This secretive group is small and, until recently, was thought to be a religious cult. It consists of a few mages who believe arcane knowledge should be restricted to a "fit and responsible" few. If magic were rarer, these few could use their power to become sorcerer-kings, and reshape life in Faerun to their own whims.

Much of the strife and widespread chaos in the Realms at present, they believe, is due to the presence of hedge-wizards in every hamlet and barnyard. The hedge-wizards all come from the thirst poor folk have for a child with a natural talent for magic, a child that will grow up to be a powerful, wealthy mage. Such a mage, they figure, can support a family in luxury and grow famous, influential, and ultimately the ruler of a large demesne.

The Masters are powerful mages, confident in their own mastery of magic, who want to increase their personal might by destroying their competitors and plundering the magic of the vanquished. This is certainly faster than the traditional archmagely pursuits of long and sometimes fruitless research, and no more dangerous than the perilous explorations of other planes and worlds (to learn strange magics from stranger beings).

Not even the Harpers know the identities of any Masters. Their work is identifiable only by a recent rash of mage-killings, in each of which the victim's face was burned away to reveal the skull beneath. One victim, the wizard Heldor of Turmish, had been contacted by the group (true to their name, they wore concealing cowls during the interview). When he refused to join them, his resulting death and magical questioning revealed the group's existence.

Those Who Harp suspect at least one of the Masters dwells in or near Westgate, another in Selgaunt, and one somewhere along the Sword Coast. Several probably dwell in the Vilhon area, and two or more in Chessenta. It is possible that this entire group is simply a mask worn by some Red Wizards of Thay, to divide and divert the energy and attention of their foes, but it is also possible that the Masters are renegade Red Wizards, who seek to turn on those of Thay.

Adventurers are warned that at least one mage of note, Malchor Harpell (one of the founders of the famed Company of Crazed Venturers), believes the Masters have developed battle-spells and possibly scrying or teleportational magics hitherto unknown, spells that can circumvent some of the widely-trusted magical barriers. He believes the faces of the Masters' victims were burned away from *within,* possibly as part of some spell that consumes a being's brain while also stealing and storing the magical knowledge it holds.

The Gold Fist

This group of shy, harried merchants dreams of overthrowing the brutal, tax-gouging, exploitative, and decadent rulers of many lands in Faerun. Its members believe that the sweat and industrious ingenuity of merchants makes the Realms run from day to day, feeding, employing, and satisfying the needs of most folk.

Merchants—especially the struggling, meeker sort who've no desire to deal in slaves, weapons, or other dangerous or outlawed goods—deserve a larger say in the running of the Realms and deserve better rewards for their work.

Open rebellion is out of the question; it's too expensive and bad for trade, for one thing. The Fist consists almost entirely of fat, puffing, silk-clad and sweating middle-aged merchants, who recognize each other through a secret symbol (a fingers-down, stiffly extended arm in a fist, clutching gold coins so that some of them stick out between the fingers). They work to curb the power of the most oppressive rulers by causing shortages of vital goods in their realms. The shortages force the ruler to empty the treasury to get what is desired (such as weapons, when the ruler plans war), hamper the empire-building schemes of rulers, and even cause unrest in a kingdom, to keep a ruler busy. Rulers who impose trade restrictions, heavy taxes, or fines are the usual targets of the Fist, but the Fist's main society work is to meet in the inner rooms of taverns in large cities, to plot and beef.

The existence of these secret societies may surprise some folk in Faerun—and delight others. Elminster advises against joining (or even actively opposing) any of these bands, unless one's heart is strong and one's present demeanor thoroughly bored. One should also not plan on a long and leisurely life, once caught up in such things.

The Living City

In the Compter

David "Zeb" Cook

"And what shall be done with those scoundrels whose crimes are petty? Surely you cannot mean to condemn them to the Abyssal planes?"

"Many a villain would tell you, my lord, that he would rather be there than serve out his term in the black bowels of a prison hulk."

Exchange between Lord Phaerdon of Uth and Magistrate Thompkins Proceedings of the Council of Lords on the Prison Question

Sad that it is to say, but even a city as progressive as Ravens Bluff is not immune to the perils of crime. There is no need to recount the deceits of the hundreds of rogues who haunt the streets and markets of the city. Their tricks are well known. Pamphlets that tell the curious all about these can be found at most subscription libraries and market fairs. The best are *A Detection of Knavery* and *The Cozener's Parliament,* both about a copper each. One would think that good citizens would take to heart the warnings they find in these pamphlets, but still the constables find too many victims who have fallen prey to these described rogues.

Ask any good citizen and he will say "something must be done about the criminals." With popular outcry growing against them, those thieves caught can hope for little mercy from the Chancery Courts. Once their day in court comes, sentence is swiftly given.

After being tried, what then becomes of these rogues—the rufflers, prigmen, anglers, doxies, bawdy baskets, and foins, as they term themselves in their own usage—whose crimes are too petty for them to be hanged? As convicts, they cannot be let loose on the streets. Exile is no solution either, for those taken by cart to the edge of the Vast just manage to slip back into Ravens Bluff with childish ease. The only true cure for these rogues is to lock them up until their sentence is served—which is precisely what the Council of Lords has made into law.

The Vagabond Act

The city has not always had prisons. It was only after much hard-fought debate on the Council of Lords that the Vagabond Act was passed. Commonly known as the Knaves' Edict, it authorized the Lord Mayor to see to the punishment, incarceration, and provisioning of "those villains as shall be disposed by city law"—the vagabonds, thieves, smugglers, arsonists, robbers, high traitors, and most murderers. Basically the act covers the population of and visitors to Ravens Bluff.

Of course, it's not a perfect piece of legislation—there are always loopholes. Some groups are immune to imprisonment by city officials. Priests of the city faiths are handed over to the Lords Ecclesiastical, who govern all things clerical. However, the priests of foreign faiths are not protected this way. Any man in service to one of the Lords of Birthright (those who sit on the Council of Lords) can be tried by the courts with only the approval of his liege. If this is refused, the lord is expected to punish the man himself. Finally the city's guilds will not allow any member of their fraternities to be locked up for a crime that relates to their trade. A goldsmith convicted of defaulting a contract would not be imprisoned by the city. Instead, he's left to the not-too-tender mercies of Goldsmith guildmasters.

Notwithstanding all these exemptions, there are still plenty of criminals for the city gaols.

The Prisons

Under the provisions of the act, the city built three official prisons over the past decade. These three are known locally as the Nevin Street Compter, the Golden Ball, and Ill-Water. Three prisons is a sign of quite the progressive government, and city officials like to show off their prisons with a perverse pride. They eagerly explain their solution to the crime problem, pointing out that only the most advanced and sophisticated cities build such fine gaols for convicted criminals.

Certainly it is hard to argue that the gaols are not an improvement, no matter how wretched conditions actually are. Before the prisons were built, execution, exile, or forced servitude were the three most common penalties for any crime. High-lawyers (highwaymen) were hanged; charms (picklocks) maimed. Nips and foins (cutpurses and pickpockets) spent years as galley workers in merchant ships. Vagabonds were normally driven from town with the threat of a good whipping.

Before the act, the dungeons of the city lords served as prisons, though mostly for the crime of being inconvenient. Unchecked by strong city laws, the lords arrested whomever they pleased or whomever displeased them. The dank dungeons were the site of many a timely death—timely, that is, for the Lords of Birthright—since death was seldom timely for the prisoner. Political rivals and unfortunate bards who wrote ill-considered satires had a habit of disappearing, never to be seen again.

Today, the lords are allowed to maintain only small dungeons for their own use. The Chancellor of Ravens Bluff, the paladin Sureblade, has made it clear that nobody but the lord's own men—and occasional prisoners of war—can be held in these private prisons. As a result, almost all the lord's dungeons are empty while the city prisons are overflowing. Still, bad as the city gaols may be, most convicts still count themselves lucky.

When the Vagabond Act was first raised, Chancellor Sureblade, determined to prevent abuse, demanded that he have the sole power to appoint all wardens and officers of the prisons. This was a major sticking point with many lords on the council. They feared giving the paladin (or anyone!) that much power. After all, what might happen if Sureblade decide to lock up all of their men? They said no, but the noble Lord Sureblade would not relent. He insisted that the lords could not be allowed to interfere, lest the whole idea of the city prisons become just another tool for the lords to terrorize their enemies. To the dismay of the lords, the paladin mustered strong popular

support against them, keeping them from having their way. The whole issue might have ended in a deadlock, but eventually a compromise was reached. The lords and Chancellor Sureblade agreed to create a Prison Commission, not under the control of the Council of Lords *or* Chancellor Sureblade.

Chancellor Sureblade's enemies managed to gain a measure of revenge, though. Unable to prevent the creation of the Prison Commission, they at least forced upon him the commissioner of their choice—Cleander of Torston.

"A Sly Contemptible . . .

. . . blest not with morals or faith." That was the Chancellor's sharp assessment of Cleander, spoken while at his dinner upon hearing of the new Commissioner's appointment. The rest of his meal was ruined by the news.

Others were only barely less cruel in their assessment of the choice. The Mayor of Ravens Bluff was said to have called him "as unscrupulously ambitious a man as I have yet confirmed to office," while the self-styled Lord Thief-Taker, Anton Paere, master of the underworld, was said to have hailed the news, saying, "At last! A man with whom I can do business." All three statements might be true—each is certainly an accurate description of the present Prison Commissioner.

Cleander first entered the public scene of Ravens Bluff government five years before his appointment. He began as an advisor in the train of Lord Varius. There he excelled in only one art—flattery. His glib and oily tongue concealed many other flaws—his plodding, dull mind, his undisguised greed, and his gross appetites for all the pleasures of the senses. He was always quick to take credit for the work of others, and if he had any talent besides flattery it was the ability to shift all blame for his mistakes to others.

Commissions

While Cleander was as ambitious as he was vile, his slow mind presented little threat to his rivals—or to a good government. In fact, the lords who forced his appointment believed he would be an easy tool for them to use. Unfortunately for everyone, Cleander had the wit to figure out how things worked, and the "how" of things was the commission.

Commissions are one of those invisible bureaucratic workings of Ravens Bluff. It's something that most citizens don't know, or if they do they dismiss it as everyday business.

While most citizens naively believe the Lord Mayor appoints every post—from high Exchequer to lowly watchman—that belief is far, very far, from the truth. The mayor simply does not have that kind of time. Some posts are claimed by the Lords of Birthright, a few are filled by runners up in the Champion's Games, but the majority are bought. Buying a city job is called "getting a Commission."

The whole business exists because there are simply too many petty posts to fill by appointing friends and allies. The Lord Mayor would quickly run out of suitable candidates. The Champion's games are a lousy way to find good clerks for the Exchequer's office, and no lord is going to let another fill all these bureaucratic posts with his cronies. As a result, all the small positions, those below the highest ranks, are filled by time-honored auctions.

From the government's point of view, this is a wonderful and profitable system. Despite the best efforts of the Exchequer (or some might say because of his efforts) the city books are almost always in the red. Oh, there's money in the treasury, but that's because Ravens Bluff regularly borrows money to meet its bills. Commission auctions prime the city coffers with needed cash to make its payments to the moneylenders. From the point of view of the Lords of Birthright, the auctions guarantee that penniless riff-raff can't reach positions of importance or power. In fact, most of the lords make good investments by providing the backing for office seekers. A lord puts up the cash and then collects his loan along with interest. Of course, it doesn't hurt to have a score of petty bureaucrats and constables beholden to you, either.

Money is the heart of the system and also its greatest flaw. The need for talent never enters the picture, and the integrity of the buyer is seldom a concern. Only the most corrupt and venal citizens ever manage to have their commissions denied. To get an office, an applicant has to spend a lot of cash. Not only does he have to pay the commission's auction price, he must usually pay for extras: bribes to clerks to get his papers filed, bribes to other clerks to lose the papers of his enemies, and more bribes to those same clerks so they won't lose his. By the time applicants get into office, they've spent a lot of money! It is amazing that the majority of city posts are filled by men and women of at least moderate ability. Their yearly wages are so small as to be almost non-existent, but these public servants work ever tirelessly.

Sure. Only the naive truly believe this rot. Fact is, most commissions get bought because a city post is a good way to make money and gain power. The right commission is usually a profitable business.

So what's this to do with prisons? Simple; after spending thousands to become the Warden of the Golden Ball, it's natural that a newly appointed official wants to get back his investment, and then some. As a result, a lot of prison wardens, guards, and turnkeys aren't there just to guard criminals, but also to make a tidy profit.

Making Crime Pay

On the surface, being a prison guard or even a warden seems like the most idiotic means of making money in all creation. That just goes to show how little a person knows about the real way of things. There's money to make running a prison, if a man's got a creative and dishonest mind.

By law, the Exchequer of Ravens Bluff pays an expense of three silver pieces per prisoner per month. It doesn't pay this to the prisoner, of course. This money goes to the warden of the lock-up and from it he is supposed to buy humane provisions for his charges.

The first money-making opportunity comes in defining "humane." There's nothing in the law that says all three silver pieces have to be spent on food, let alone any of them. Now a warden is not going to let his prisoners all starve—that would look bad—but nobody worries about feeding them well. The average warden pockets two silver pieces out of every three. For 500 prisoners, that means 100 gold pieces a month without any work—not a lot, but enough to cover some expenses.

Some of the savings are legitimate—a man can get a good deal buying cabbages for five hundred as opposed to one—but more savings come from cutting corners. Stale biscuits, rotted fruit, mealy flour, and maggoty meat, if any meat at all, are all common purchases. Merchants let these go at cut-rate prices, knowing nobody else is likely to buy them.

From these ingredients prisoners get two meals a day. In the morning there's usually a cold thin gruel, little more than a paste of flour and water. In evening the main meal is usually something like old turnips and rancid pork fat boiled into a stew. Nobody gets strong or well on food like this. In fact, those that live purely on prison food cannot heal wounds and must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation each month or lose one point of Constitution.

What the warden skims from the finances hardly meets his expenses, let alone those of his guards and trustees. To raise more cash, the wardens in the Compter sell better lodgings, even within the walls. Living conditions are divided into four categories, all depending on a prisoner's ability to pay.

The finest of these is the Lord's Ward. Here a prisoner hardly feels like one at all. His "cell" is several rooms for himself. A man can bring in all the comforts of home, including a private servant to cook and tend to his needs. More than one crime lord has run his affairs from the comfort of the Lord's Ward, safely supervising the activities of his old gang. Lodging in the Lord's Ward costs 100 gp a week.

When a man can no longer afford the Lord's Ward, he typically steps down to the Knight's Ward. Here no servants are allowed and cells are a single comfortable room, but the wardens provide good food for the prisoner. One visitor is allowed in per day, for a small gratuity. The Knight's Ward costs a mere 50 gp per week.

The next step down is the Common's Ward. Here a prisoner bunks with six or seven others in a single room. Meals are served in a dining hall and are the poor fare already described. For an extra silver per day, a prisoner can buy decent meals. Visitors are limited to once a week. The Common's Ward costs 5 gp per week of a stay.

Worst of all is the Hole. No man wants to go to one of these (for all the prisons in Ravens Bluff have one), but sometimes there's no choice. In the Compter, those that can't pay go to the Hole. At the Golden Ball and Ill-Water, it's other reasons that get a man sent to the Hole—violence, a guard's petty revenge, even a bribe by an enemy on the outside. Life in any of the Holes tends to be nasty, brutal, and prematurely short.

There are other ways for all the wardens to profit, and not just those of the Nevin Street Compter. Wealthy prisoners can even buy their way out of the hulks or even Ill-Water and into the relative comfort of the Compter. This is not a cheap choice, however, since it typically costs 5,000 gp or more to make the transfer.

All prisoners are encouraged to work while serving their sentence. For those at the Compter this is usually a trade, while aboard the Golden Ball it is hard labor. The prisoners of Ill-Water have the fewest and most dangerous opportunities—the assassins, corrupt wizards, foul priests, and dark monsters housed here are sometimes "hired" for dark deeds they are well-suited to.

The money earned from their work goes to the guards and trustees. How much they give in turn to the prisoners all depends on things like the prisoner's clout, the rarity of his skills, and even how well he gets along. The gamblers who fashion crooked dice at the Compter usually see about 40% of their profits; the galley servants on the Golden Ball see absolutely nothing.

Another profit maker is the *exit fee.* Just serving time doesn't get a fellow out of prison. He's also got to bribe the guards for his release. Oh, it all looks legal—sort of. There's claims of dishes broken, missed payments for lodging,

interest on loans, and the like, all meant to bleed a man dry. The more useful and profitable the prisoner, the higher the exit fee is going to be. A greedy jailer doesn't want his best-paying prizes getting away.

In addition to these larger means of wringing money from a stone, the jailers have perfected a whole string of petty grasping tricks. There are bribes for everything. Packages can be smuggled through, unusual visitors allowed in, even faked writs to give a criminal temporary "leave of the city," so he can go about town and do business. It's not uncommon for a well-off thief to even make the Compter his home, paying for good lodging and bribing the guards with treasures he's stolen while on leave. All that's needed is the money.

The Compter

Of the three prisons in Ravens Bluff, the Nevin Street Compter is the least feared of the lot. Looking like little more than a three-story workhouse, the prison would hardly be noticed except for its iron-barred windows. Given the cat burglars and anglers in town, even bars are hardly unusual. It's only when a passerby nears the front entrance that he notices anything different. Then he sees the score or so beggars clustered outside are dirty and chained, pleading for coins to buy their freedom. Not far away lounges a lone guard bearing the badge of the city on his tabard.

The prison takes its name from its location—half-way down Nevin Street, just east of Grismort Mews—and its purpose. A compter is a jail for debtors, and that's what most of the prisoners here are. Fail to pay bills or get in an argument about a contract, and a character's likely to end up here.

Nevin Street's not the stoutest prison in the world, so those sent here are the ones the watch and magistrates deem are least dangerous. The Compter has no special cells for wizards, priests, or master rogues, let alone things much worse. At best the guards will come by and prod a sleeping spell-caster every hour or so, preventing him from getting a decent night's sleep. Of course, no guard is fool enough to leave a wizard his spellbooks either—unless the price is right.

So most of the people locked up in the Compter are people who can't pay their bills—dirty vagrants, over-extended merchants, and spendthrift adventurers. More than a few drunken barbarians who wake to a numbing headache and a massive bill wind up here. And here they'll rot until someone raises the cash for them or they work their way out of debt.

Of course, with the illogic that could only apply in Ravens Bluff, the Nevin Street Compter is the one fitted with Lord's Accommodations. Being jailed for bad debts doesn't necessarily mean a man's broke. Maybe cash-flow just wasn't quite right at the time—or maybe a man just doesn't want to honor the debt. Some rogues even view the time spent in the Compter as a vacation, or perhaps a refuge from their enemies. After all, how many folks try to break into a prison?

Of course, not everything's all comfort and luxury. The Compter has the largest Hole of all three prisons, though not the worst—that honor is saved for Ill-Water. "Rats"—tramps, the homeless, hopeless drunkards, wretched laborers, even naive barbarians—are all crammed into the squalid Hole that makes up the cellars and sub-cellars of the place. Some, like the drunks, only spend a night or two until they're fit enough to be loosed on the streets once more. Others will stay here until an amnesty for their debts is declared.

The Compter's Hole is a cheerless place. Light comes from a single high window, water from a single, greasy bucket. One hundred bodies—men, women, and children—are crammed into vaults 10 yards on a side. There's barely space for a man to lie down, if he wants to sleep in straw crawling with lice, fleas, and rats. Some three to 10 prisoners in the Hole die each week from heatstroke and suffocation in summer, pneumonia and frostbite in winter, and starvation at any time.

The warden of the compter is Gilcrain Vast-Rider. A short, hulking man with a thick brow and customarily slack-jawed expression, Gilcrain was a lieutenant in a lord's guard until he was lamed by an orcish spear. Unable to pay for a proper healing at the time, Gilcrain invested all his savings in this commission with an eye toward raising the funds he needs. Gilcrain is cold-hearted and efficient, never yielding once to a plea for mercy. Still, he is not evil by nature. His actions are driven by his needs, to heal himself and to restore the small fortune he has already spent.

Under Gilcrain's command are 20 gaolers, five cooks, and an ever-changing number of runners, attendants, pot-boys, and grooms. These all watch over an ever-changing population of 400 + prisoners—debtors, drunks, and doxies all. The majority of these jailers are in it for the money, and few who want to improve and reform the prisons can stand working in these corrupt and vile conditions.

The prisoners of the Compter are not without their protectors. Beyond the usual assortment of advocates and go-betweens, several temples maintain small shrines in the inner courtyard of the prison. Chapels to Ilmater, Torm, and Tyr are all found here, and their priests do what they can to inspire the convicts and relieve their sufferings. With so many prisoners, and such poor conditions in the Hole, they can often do no more than pray.

Physically, the Compter is a three-story stone shell with a wooden interior. All windows are fitted with iron bars, those on the ground floor being particularly stout. The stout wooden doors and walls are sufficient to hold a common prisoner of average determination, the typical debtor or petty thief for example. Escape is difficult but not impossible. Certainly a man could try to burn his way out, but given the old dry wood of the building, this is a singularly bad idea. Even if the fire doesn't kill the one who set it, the inferno it creates will certainly slaughter hundreds trapped in the cellars below.

The Golden Ball

If they had any choice, most criminals would prefer not to go to the Nevin Street Compter—unless the Golden Ball was their only other choice. Nobody wants to go to the Golden Ball, not even the wardens posted there. The Ball's a vile, stinking pit, or more properly a vile, leaking hulk.

To be absolutely precise, the Golden Ball is the largest of three old, worm-eaten ships moored on the river. To the rogue in the dock it doesn't matter which he's sent to—a sentence to the Golden Ball is as good as doom.

The Golden Ball was once a fine ship, a former grand galley in the Tantras fleet. When it was too old to be seaworthy, Ravens Bluff bought it for harbor work. The other two hulks in the prison fleet are the Lasher, a galleon seized for unpaid wharf taxes, and the Broadback, a river barge purchased by the city many years ago. When in port, these ships can be found moored at the

dock just inside the mouth of the river.

More often, at least one of the vessels is out in the harbor so the prisoners can work. Convict work here is brutally simple—dredging the harbor. Silt flooded out of the Vast continually threatens to choke the harbor channels to ship traffic. Only constant maintenance keeps the channels clear. Convict labor is the cheapest way of solving the problem, so each day the prisoners drag iron scoops across the harbor bottom, raising buckets of muck.

The hulks are not for every prisoner. It takes a special type to get sent here. The petty criminals—beggars, debtors, card cheats, cutpurses, and drunkards—are sent to Nevin Street. The most dangerous criminals—giants, arch-wizards, werewolves, and even fighter-lords—are sealed behind the grisly walls of Ill-Water. The Golden Ball mostly gets common murderers, rapists, arsonists, burglars, highway men, pirates, even ogres—men all who've killed and robbed. Even then those convicts bound for the Golden Ball who can afford it buy their way into the easier accommodations of Nevin Street. Of course, the wardens are only too happy to arrange the move, for a price.

On the hulks, a prisoner's typical day starts at five in the morning when the drumbeats signal a breakfast of cold gruel. After this meager fare, the wretched convicts are unchained and set to the oars. Within an hour their ship is rowed into position for the day's work. Out in the harbor, most of the prisoners spend their day at the back-breaking task of dredging the harbor channels. Huge iron buckets are tipped over the side and dragged across the bottom until filled with sludge. The full buckets are then hauled to the surface and dumped onto the barge. All the work is done by muscle power, the prisoners heaving on cables run through simple jigs and capstans. When the deck is filled with the slimy, rotten-fish ooze, the convicts row the barge to shore and shovel the deck clean once more.

At the end of the day, the prisoners get one more meal of gruel, warm if they are lucky. When this is finished, they are herded into the lightless holds and chained together for the night to sleep with the rats and lice.

Life on the hulks is savage, ugly, and short. Every day a character spends in these loathsome conditions requires a System Shock check. Pass the check and the character makes it through another day. Fail the check and the character suffers 1d6 points of damage from exhaustion, starvation, and wounds. There is no such thing as a sick call here: no rest, no healing. Sooner or later even the strongest and fittest of prisoners can fall.

If the hard work doesn't kill the character, his companions just might. Unlike the Compter, the hulks aren't just limited to *safe* prisoners. The convicts here are dangerous and will just as soon kill a man as talk to him. Characters better take care who they offend and better be ready to fight for their rights. So-called master thieves, untameable barbarians, and prisoners of war all get chained here together.

Malicious wizards and dark priests get special attention. Precautions are taken with the spell-casters before they are even brought aboard, the priests in particular. A spell-caster is confined only after the City Watch feels sure he's used all his spells. If necessary, the authorities will use their own magic to wipe a mind clean.

Even these precautions don't reassure the guards, so they make sure no spell-caster gets a decent night's sleep. Every few hours they'll douse a dozing wizard with buckets of stinking harbor water or beat his feet with canes. Concentration and rest are impossible. There's no chance of praying for spells. Because of this extra-special attention, spell-casters suffer a −10 on the System Shock checks needed to endure this place.

Salvage Rights

Like all things in the prison system, the wardens of the hulk fleet have found ways to make a profit from their charges. As already described, they short their prisoners' rations. They also hire out their hulks to dredge private piers or tow grounded ships free of the Bar. Still, short rations and occasional jobs don't make for a steady income.

The captain-wardens of the hulk fleet therefore exploit an old law on the Ravens Bluff rolls—the right of salvage. The law is simple: the cargo of any wrecked, grounded, or abandoned ship can be claimed by whoever clears the obstruction. With their equipment and convict labor, the hulks are well-suited to the task.

Since the captains can claim as salvage any wreck they board, most merchants find it easier to buy the captain's aid in salvaging their wares. They keep their goods, and the salvager makes a profit without incurring the merchant's wrath.

Of course, every so often there comes a captain-warden with less than sterling character. He joins with pirates to take an active hand in wrecking profitable ships. This is something even the corrupt prison system of Ravens Bluff can't tolerate, since it threatens the trade which keeps the city going. There is a special section of Ill-Water reserved for such wreckers.

Ill-Water

The name is never said without a quick pass to ward off evil. Ill-Water inspires fear in the honest and the evil alike. The good shudder at the crimes of those imprisoned there; the villainous tremble at the punishments doled out there. Of all the prisons in Ravens Bluff, Ill-Water comes closest to Chancellor Sureblade's vision—a place where evil is confined and justice served.

Ill-Water is a massive pile of cyclopean stone adrift in the mouth of Ravens Bluff's harbor. With its turrets, walks, and massive gates, strangers often mistake it for the Lord Mayor's castle—an amusing thought to the locals since the Lord Mayor has no castle. Ill-Water is large and massive because it must be, for sealed in it are the most powerful, most savage, most cunning, and most hated prisoners of all Ravens Bluff.

Not every criminal in Ravens Bluff and those parts of the Vast it protects is a simple thief or warrior too quick with his sword. Early on, the Lords of Council discovered there was another type of criminal—those of monstrous power, ambition, and form—that needed special treatment. At first the preferred method of dealing with marauding giants, wizards aspiring to lichdom, and the priests of evil gods was execution. It was swift and it solved the problem of keeping powerful prisoners confined. A Lord of Birthright simply said, "That one dies," and that was justice.

Unfortunately, Ravens Bluff has grown larger and more civilized. It is not enough to execute the enemy—laws must be observed. The Lords of Birthright were far too willing to kill annoying rivals along with the monstrously guilty. Furthermore, killing them wasn't enough. It was thought far better to imprison them forever with no hope of escape. That would be a proper example

to other fiends.

The problem was how to imprison archmages, high priests, giants, dopplegangers, even vampires? Ordinary locks, cells, walls, and guards wouldn't do. Special prisoners required special measures. It is a credit to Chancellor Sureblade and to all the craftsmen of Ravens Bluff that they built a prison as secure as Ill-Water.

Ill-Water is unique, as prisons go. There are no cells, no exercise yards, no mess halls, no kitchens. Guards do not patrol the halls, and prisoners never see visitors from the outside world. Once put in, no one is ever released. Ill-Water is divided into two parts—the Outer Walk and the Core.

The Outer Walk is the territory of guards, wardens, and magical barriers. There are no prisoners here, save those about to be locked within the Core. The guards don't supervise the prisoners and almost never see those inside. Physically, the Outer Walk is a shell of walls plated in lead and sealed with permanent anti-magic shields. The powers of those trapped inside cannot break out. Would-be rescuers on the outside cannot, it is believed, break in.

The most prominent feature of the Outer Walk is the walk itself, a roadway topping the walls that is constantly patrolled by squads of guards, five strong. It is their duty to watch both the dark stone walls of the Core and the waters around Ill-Water. The guards have instructions to fire on anyone who draws too close by sea or air. Each prison tower is fitted with ballistae to aid in this defence.

The second arresting feature is the Gate to the Abyss. This is the only opening to the Core. It is massive, double-guarded and triple-barred, the weakest point in the whole structure. A great lane runs from the portals of lead and gold to the island's sole pier. The way is lined by shrines to each of the city's gods, each watched by a priest of its faith. These clerics are posted out of civic duty. Some may pray for those trapped within, but all are ready to foil any attempted breakout.

The rest of the Outer Walk consists of buildings needed for the guards and wardens. There are barracks, kitchens, storerooms, messhalls, armories, and the offices of scribes.

The Core is the country of those condemned. Once cast through the gates of the Outer Walk, it's every prisoner for himself. The Core is a vast, lightless block of halls, chambers, dungeons, and caverns. In that darkness the prisoners have shaped their own society, one based of power, fear, madness, and evil.

No one can say for sure what this lightless world is like. The core is not open to visitors and if any prisoners have escaped, they are not advertising their success. Speculation describes a society of sinister clans, some at war and others scheming, amid a world of ragged madmen and albino cannibals. What they eat, how they see, and how they pass their days is never explained. Perhaps it is better not to know.

So what kind of criminal earns the privilege of being sent to Ill-Water? What crimes are so foul that only this punishment will do?

Traitors are perhaps first on the list. Certainly a free city like Ravens Bluff must guard against those who would sell her to some tyrant lord. With them are often sent their conspirators and cronies, so it is easy to imagine cliques built around these bitter exiles.

After traitors come the too-powerful. There are those whose only "crime" is ambition. Ravens Bluff couldn't call itself just if it condemned its citizens for simply being ambitious. But when ambition combines with the power of an archmage, the Lords of Birthright simply cannot ignore it. Those who threaten the safe order of things are usually arrested on petty charges, "tried," and sentenced. The trial isn't fair and the outcome is predetermined. No matter what the crime, the punishment is always the same—confinement to Ill-Water for the rest of their lives. It is all illegally legal, and the good folk of Ravens Bluff accept it as one of those unfortunate realities that must be done for the good of the many.

Third on the list come the extremely inconvenient. Blackmailers foolish enough to learn secrets about the Lords—and get themselves caught—wind up here. Assassins who are no longer needed, spies who have delivered their secrets, all these souls are cast into Ill-Water. It would be easier just to kill them, but, unfortunately, death is no promise that secrets will stay buried. With its magical barriers and inescapable walls, Ill-Water is.

After these come a whole assortment of criminals for whom death is a mercy. There are human monsters whose crimes are beyond comprehension and true monsters that will not stay dead. There are evil priests whose deaths would offend a god and arch-wizards too well-protected for death to claim.

Since no one has ever escaped from Ill-Water—at least as far as the wardens of Ravens Bluff know—it is a fate truly worse than death. How many still live in its bowels and how many have died no one can ever say.

Some Friendly Advice

It should be clear to even the dullest character that getting imprisoned in Ravens Bluff is not a good idea. However, player characters being who they are, it almost certainly will happen, sooner or later. Adventurers have a tendency to find themselves at the center of tavern brawls, mysterious murders, foiled robberies, and political infighting. Sooner or later one of these will lead to an arrest and conviction. If this happens, the player characters might want to heed some good advice.

Hire a good advocate. Facing prison is no time to be stingy! While advocates can't actually plead cases, good ones know amazing legal loopholes to get a person acquitted.

Be useful. Many petty criminals can avoid prison if they can be of some use to the Lords of Birthright. Adventurers can offer their skills in exchange for their freedom.

Uphold the law. It may not be honorable, but one way to avoid prison is to turn somebody else in. If an accused character can squeal on a bigger fish, it just may get him off. Of course, it is a risk, because the charge might not stick.

Money has power. Gold coins have an amazing influence on all sorts of people, especially judges, guards, and witnesses. This goes along with hiring good advocates, since they usually know just which palms to grease and with how much.

Flee! When all else fails, make a break for it. Sure, the character will have to stay outside Ravens Bluff for a while, but the City Watch is far too busy to track down escapees. That's the theory, at least.

The best thing, of course, is to be good, honest, true—and lucky. Unfortunately these aren't always things a being can depend on. So, if that's the case, it's best to have other options open.

Sweet Revenge

An AD&D® game adventure for characters 1st-3rd level

by Rick Reid

Players' Introduction

The Keep at Ongoin is much like every other heavily fortified little village you have visited—with one major exception. The local economy is based solely on the output from a wondrous series of caverns to the north dubbed the Caves of Confection. Within these caves can be found thick veins of rock sugar, bubbling pools of caramel, and natural springs of chocolate sauce.

Life was peaceful and serene in the little village until one month ago when Fizzie, the priest of the local and very powerful Temple of Confection, mysteriously declared the caverns a holy site and forbade further mining. The miners were quickly laid off, and the stock of sugary treats in stores and inns were consumed. Now the townspeople are out of sweets, and the economy is in ruins. At least Fizzie the priest is happy.

Since it is unthinkable to defy the wishes of the temple publicly, you and a group of concerned citizens decided to meet in secret to discuss what can be done to save the keep's economy. After much heated debate, punctuated by townspeople's cries for sugar, you decided to travel to the caves and peek inside. Perhaps there is something within the rock candy walls that has scared Fizzie enough to declare the caves off-limits. Perhaps you can set things right.

It is nearly midnight when you conclude your meeting and make your way out the basement and through the darkened streets of town. You notice that the full moon is glowing with a strange light and a hazy glaze surrounds it.

The streets of Ongoin are worn and potholed, and tall weeds grow between the cracks. The cottages and shops are rundown and obviously neglected—all because the people are distraught over the mines and the lack of sugar. In front of one of the closed shops sits a group of emaciated men, women, and children dressed in tattered rags. A small fluffy white dog sits next to them and howls forlornly. Next to the beggars are crudely painted wooden signs reading "Will Work for Candy."

As the PCs approach the group, the beggars hold out chipped sugar bowls and grunt and drool. They surround the characters, brandishing their spoons and chanting, "Sweets for the Poor!" The younger children start gnawing on the characters' boots. The beggars continue to follow the PCs until they are given something sweet or until the PCs make it clear there are no sweets to relinquish. As the PCs continue through the rest of the adventure, consult the lettered text that corresponds to sections of the map.

Through the Woods

The path through the woods north of town is quiet . . . almost too quiet. The strangely glowing moon seems to coat the bare trees with a frosted haze. The only creature you meet in passing is a lone squirrel hanging from a branch on a tree to your right. As you walk by, the squirrel chatters at you and slowly shakes its tiny head as if questioning the wisdom of your mission.

A. The Caves of Confection

After a journey of approximately a half hour you come upon the face of a towering cliff. At the base is a dark, roughly circular entrance approximately a dozen feet in diameter. There are tall piles of rocks and boulders on both sides of the cave mouth.

Across the entrance are two thick wooden boards with writing on them. Standing in front of this barricade is a squat humanoid figure. The creature's smooth shell-like skin shines with a yellow glow in the moonlight. There is a faint odor of lemons in the air.

The creature is a lemon drop golem created to guard the entrance to the caves. If anyone approaches within 10 feet, it immediately attacks. The boards across the entrance read "Closed by Order of the Temple of Confection—No Mining, No Admittance." The boards easily can be removed by anyone with a Strength of 12 or greater.

Golem, lemon drop (1): INT Non; AL N; AC 2; MV 9; HD 6; hps 41; THAC0 19; #AT 2; D 1-8/1-8 (fists); SD immune to *sleep, charm* and *hold* spells, edged weapons inflict one-half damage, cold or water-based attacks inflict double damage; S L (10' tall); ML 12; XP Value 270

B. The Caves

Past the entrance you see a cavity extending 60 feet north and then veering to the east. The walls, floors, and ceiling are hard and rocky, and the cavern is dark and gloomy.

If the PCs examine the floor, they discover it is sprinkled with a coating of sugar. Human and monster tracks can be seen in the spilled sweetener.

C. Semi-Sweet Stream

In the north tunnel, a thick, cloying odor of chocolate fills the air. The northern passage continues for about 40 feet and opens into a large chamber. Intersecting this chamber is a stream of thick brown fluid which flows sluggishly from an opening in the east wall and disappears into a similar opening in the west wall. Across the stream is an exit in the center of the north wall. Several messy, brown, vaguely humanoid footprints are on the northern bank of the stream. The footprints seem to emerge from the stream and follow the northern passage out of the chamber.

The stream, which is three feet deep, is not actually chocolate but is composed of run-off from the sugar mines mixed with naturally-occurring subterranean

vegetation and minerals. This gives the thick liquid the taste, appearance, and texture of real chocolate.

The footprints were made by skeletons that Fizzie, who is actually an evil priest, controls and orders about at his whim.

To go farther north, the PCs will have to ford the stream. Those doing so must make a successful Dexterity check with a −3 penalty to avoid slipping and covering themselves and their possessions with the chocolate goo. Gooey PCs suffer a −2 penalty on all movement, attack, and saving throw rolls until they are thoroughly cleaned off. If the PCs investigate the footprints, reveal that they lead down the north tunnel and eventually dry up.

D. Land of the Giants

> You continue along the east passage for several yards before emerging into a big cavern. You spy shadows moving along the walls and hear a strange shuffling sound followed by a loud "crack!"

This is the main sugar mine of the caves. The rough rock walls are impregnated with thick veins of raw sugar. There is an opening in the north wall and a very crude tunnel in the south wall. Inside the cavern are six giant sugar ants, partially cloaked in the shadows of the cave walls. During their perpetual tunneling, the ants broke through the walls of the cavern and discovered the mine. The ants are mining the sugar from the cavern, breaking large chunks off the walls with their powerful mandibles and piling the chunks in the center of the room. The ants ignore the PCs unless the PCs attack, interfere with their mining, or enter the southern passage which leads to their nest.

Ants, giant sugar (5): INT Animal; AL N; AC 3; MV 18; HD 3; hps 16 each; THAC0 16; #AT 1; D 2-8; S M (6' long); ML 9; XP Value 35

E. Nest Sweet Nest

> The passage meanders in a generally southern direction for approximately 60 feet and ends in a natural cavern. Piles of rock, dirt, and sugar lumps litter the floor. A half-dozen pieces of large, pale yellow fruit sit before a massive ant.

The passage was dug by the giant sugar ants and leads to their nest and the queen. When the ants realize that the PCs are about to enter their domain, they will follow the characters down the passage and attack them in the nest. The ants fight to the death to defend the queen. The fruit is known as "fruit of the gods" and serves as food for the queen. Each piece of the fruit consumed heals 2-12 points of damage.

Ant, giant sugar queen (1): INT Semi-; AL N; AC 5; MV 18; HD 6; hps 40; THAC0 13; #AT 1; D 2-12; S L (10' long); ML 9; XP Value 175

F. Troll House Cookies

> You exit the sugar mine to the north and travel down a long corridor. Suddenly your noses are assaulted by a sharp burning smell in the air. Up ahead you see thick clouds of roiling black smoke filling the tunnel.

The corridor ends in a cavern that is used as a bakery. Heat is provided by naturally occurring veins of magma which flow beyond the walls. Several large iron doors are built into the walls,

'saries

& Kor

Nesmith

Kortentak, Warchief of the Tartakay

8th Level Male Human Fighter
STR: 17
DEX: 11
CON: 15
INT: 9
WIS: 14
CHR: 13

Armor Class: 8 (5 w/scale mail)
Hit Points: 60

Alignment: Chaotic Neutral
Languages: Common, Tartakay, and a handful of other tribal tongues
Age: 32
Height: 6'2"
Weight: 220

Weapon Proficiencies: Spear (specialized), hand axe, dagger, long bow, two-handed sword
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Swimming, Riding (land based), Animal Lore, Hunting, Survival, Tracking
Magical Items: None

Kortentak, known simply as Kor to most, has darkly tanned skin, at least where it shows. He is uncommonly hairy, without actually having fur like an animal. The coat of downy fur present at his birth went away within a year. His black hair is a wild, curly mane that cascades over his shoulders. On formal occasions he ties it back into a ponytail.

The men of the Tartakay tribe are naturally cleanshaven. Every couple of days Kor shaves his face with a sharp knife. The hair grows back so quickly that in a full day it is almost a quarter of an inch long.

In the heat of summer, Kor wears only a loin cloth. Winter in the tribal lands is far milder than where Cedric lives. In winter Kor wears a long sleeved hide jersey and hide pants with soft leather shoes stitched right to them. His feet are bare in summer. Jewelry among the Tartakay are trophies from the hunt or from battles. Kor has a necklace of aurumvorax claws. He sports a set of four parallel scars on his right thigh from the battle with the beast. Temperamentally Kor is the opposite of Cedric. It is almost impossible for him to hide his feelings from others. He is known for his fierce temper and his unqualified loyalty. He has had many brawls with other tribe members and made a few enemies. Although he is not an attractive man (many even say he is ugly), his powerful personality makes most people overlook that.

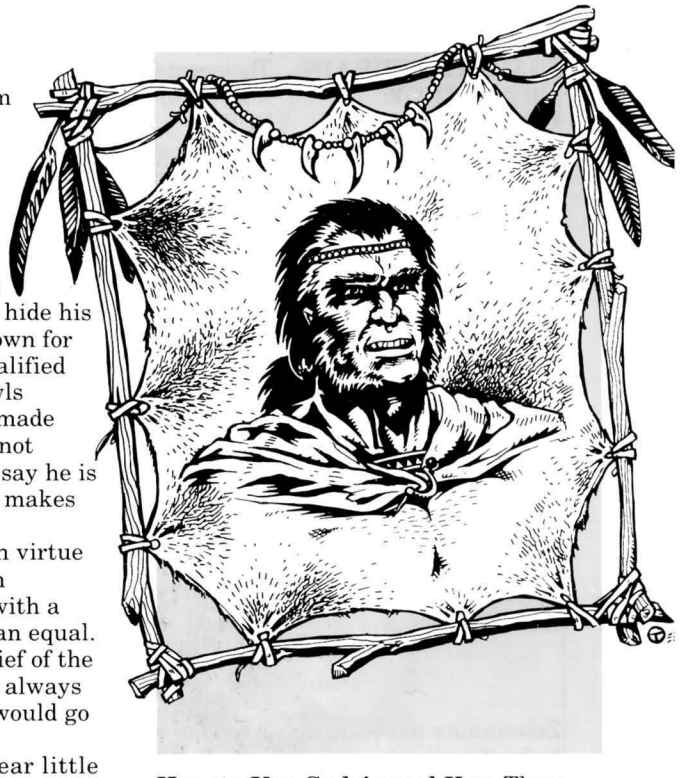
Kor became warchief through virtue of his combat prowess. He is an unmatched fighter, attacking with a ferocity few of the tribesmen can equal. In council meetings Tartak, chief of the tribe and his adopted father, is always having to hold him back. Kor would go to war over any insult.

Members of the Tartakay wear little armor for honorable battle. They don chest plates made of woven leather studded with bits of shell (AC 9) when hunting. In tribal conflicts a wood and leather shield is added (+1 AC). Traditional weapons are spears, clubs, hand axes, bows and arrows. Kor prefers the spear. The non-weapon proficiencies of hunting and survival come with his barbarian heritage, and do not count against his total slots.

When the Tartakay fight against foes without honor (most city states or civilized nations seem to qualify), they wear scavenged armor and use captured weapons. Kor has a set of scale mail that he won this way, and a two-handed sword.

Kor believes in the freedom of the individual. He is loyal to his friends and family. Rules and laws are only worth following so long as they don't hurt those close to him. He tends to act before thinking. While he is not learned or clever, he is wise in the ways of people. He has a great empathy for others. Money and possessions mean little to Kor.

Tartak recently told Kor the truth about his heritage. Kor always knew he was adopted by the tribe, but never knew who his real people or real parents were. Now he has set off to make the long journey north to the city. He wants to find his parents and his true family.



How to Use Cedric and Kor: These twins are all set to become lifelong adversaries. Cedric will never accept Kor, knowing that his twin brother is the true Lord of the Southern Reaches. Kor is the antithesis of everything Cedric believes in. Cedric is not a murderer and will stop short of that step, unless absolutely forced. However, he will threaten the Tartakay tribe to drive Kor away.

Kor will be dismayed by what he sees in the city. He will quickly see Cedric for what he is. While Kor has no desire to become Lord of the Southern Reaches, he will not be able to stand by and do nothing. It won't take him long to hate his own brother.

Eventually Kor will become chief of the Tartakay. As the only son of Chief Tartak, he will earn the title upon his foster father's death. Forces in the city will attempt to use Kor as a pawn against Cedric. Should Kor come to be Lord of the Southern Reaches, he could unite the Tartakay tribe and the city.

Your player characters could run into either Kor or Cedric. Cedric is certain to embroil them into a plot to dishonor or remove Kor. Kor will just try to be friends with them. They could become involved in one of Cedric's plots. They could be approached by rivals of Cedric looking to take control of the Albanardach family from him.

Zebranaur

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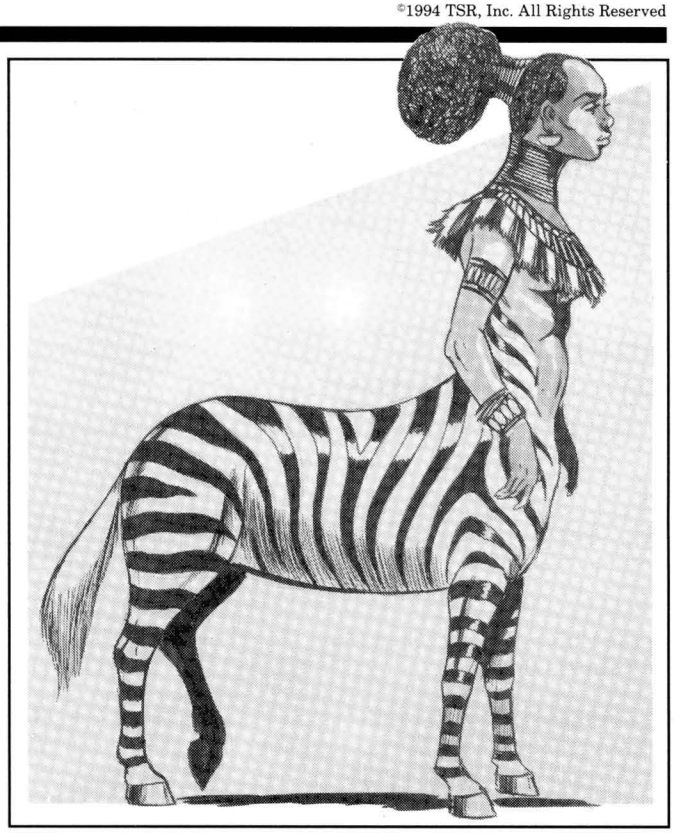
CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Temperate plains
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Tribal
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Day
DIET:	Omnivorous
INTELLIGENCE:	Average (8-10)
TREASURE:	M, Q (I, Mx10)
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	2-16
ARMOR CLASS:	7
MOVEMENT:	20
HIT DICE:	3
THAC0:	17 (16)
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1 or 2
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-4/1-4 or by weapon type
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	+1 with bows
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	L (6′ and taller)
MORALE:	Steady (11-12)
XP VALUE:	Normal: 420 Chief: 650 Druid: 975



Zebranaurs have the upper body of a human and the lower body of a zebra.

A zebranaur's upper body is normally brown, without the characteristic black on white stripes that cover its lower body. Many have a short mane of coarse black bristles running from the middle of the lower back up to the nape of the neck. Most favor a spiky hairstyle, but others prefer the traditional styles of the local humans.

Zebranaurs usually wear an individually embroidered square of supple leather which covers their chests and is tied around the waist and neck with leather thongs. They adorn themselves with jewelry made of wood and bone, using feathers and bright seeds to color their designs. Zebranaurs prize brass and copper jewelry and will trade well-made fringed garments or feathered spears for these items.

Most zebranaurs paint their upper bodies with dark stripes or patterns, using vegetable dyes to enhance the effect of their camouflaged lower bodies. New markings are added yearly to commemorate achievements, battles, or loves. Some tribes engage in ritual tattooing when foals come of age. One southern tribe has developed this tattooing to a fine art. The soft, downy skin from the upper back of an adolescent foal, resplendent with blue, red, and orange markings in intricate designs and patterns is said to fetch at least 1,000 gp in some Calishite markets.

Combat: Because of their long-standing tradition of bow hunting, all zebranaurs gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls with all bows except crossbows. Not all zebranaurs use bows, however. When a band is encountered, 30% use spears, 20% swords, 20% sword and spear, and 30% sword and bow. If unarmed, zebranaurs attack with their front hooves for 1-4 points of damage each. Zebranaurs never wear armor.

Zebranaur society does not discriminate against its female members, and females will make up 30% of any encountered band. In a group of more than 10 zebranaurs, there is a 50% chance that the group includes a chief and a druid.

Habitat/Society: Zebranaurs are tribal creatures, much like the humans who live nearest them. They are led by a chief of 4 HD and AC 6.

Zebranaurs are nomadic by nature, and their temporary camps are well guarded by 8-12 zebranaurs armed with swords and bows.

An average tribe numbers 50-80 members, including 20% children and 30% females. Males are equally responsible for raising the young, preparing meals, teaching, and performing other traditionally domestic duties.

A tribe usually has one druid of fourth or fifth level and three to four druids of levels one to three. They are armed with quarterstaffs or scimitars.

Zebranaurs have an almost photographic memory for abstract designs and shapes. They cannot normally read or write Common, but they paint intricately whorled patterns on tanned leather to record their history. The senior druid keeps these records safe and passes on the knowledge to the next generation.

The typical zebranaur life span is 50-60 years.

Zebranaurs speak the Common tongue and may know another spoken language, usually Goblin, Orc, Gnome, Gnoll, Halfling, Hobgoblin, or Elvish.

Ecology: Zebranaurs hunt most types of small game, supplementing this diet with roots and berries.

Dorvesh

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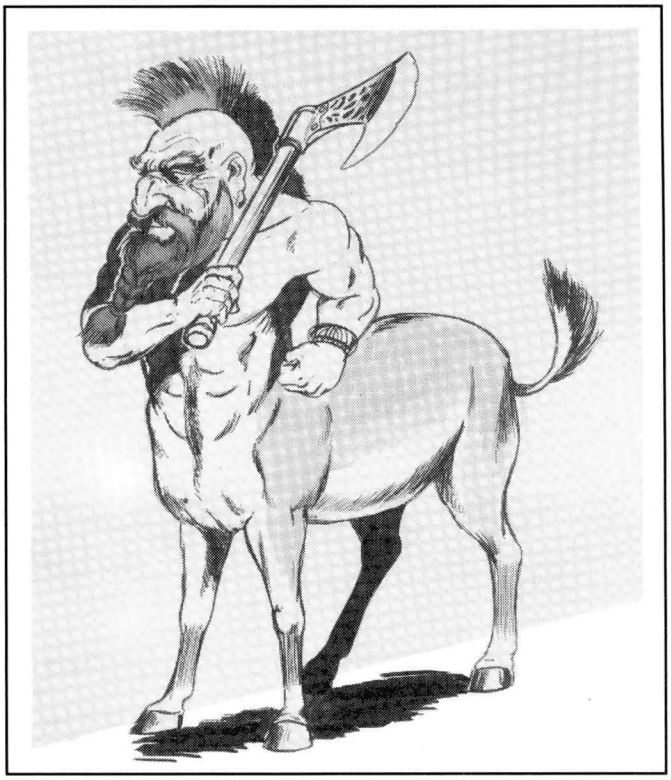
CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Temperate hills or mountains
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Clan
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Day
DIET:	Omnivorous
INTELLIGENCE:	Average (8-10)
TREASURE:	M, Q (B)
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	2-12
ARMOR CLASS:	4 (7)
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	4
THAC0:	17
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1 or 2
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-6/1-6 or by weapon type
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Nil
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	+4 saving throw vs. spells and poison
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	L (5′ and taller)
MORALE:	Champion (15-16)
XP VALUE:	Normal: 420 Chief: 650



Dorvesh have the upper body of a dwarf and the lower body of a donkey. Their donkey hindquarters are covered with coarse hair which varies from light brown to black. The dwarven upper half is usually well-muscled and earthy brown. Dorvesh retain the full beards of their dwarven cousins.

Dorvesh clans are distrustful of outsiders, but they are not overly aggressive. They will fight only to defend themselves or their homesteads.

When not expecting combat, dorvesh wear simple tunics of tough leather or hide; otherwise, they wear chain mail vests and carry shields. They wear their hair long and braided to keep it out of the way when they work in the mines.

Combat: Dorvesh do not use magic of any kind, and only rarely do they use magical items. Dorvesh have an inherited resistance to spells and poison, and they gain a +4 bonus to saving throws vs. spells and poison.

Dorvesh delight in mining minerals and metals but do not have the same affinity with earth as dwarves, for their mines do not delve deeply into the earth, and they can detect the slope of a passageway (1-3 on 1d6) and new tunnel construction (1-4 on 1d6). They have infravision to a range of 30′.

Although not warlike, dorvesh are well organized and disciplined when forced to fight. They are intuitive strategists. They wear chain mail vests and tough leather barding, and they carry shields.

Dorvesh wield a variety of weapons: hammers (35%), swords and light crossbows (25%), axes (25%), or axes and heavy crossbows (15%). If unarmed, dorvesh attack with their front hooves, inflicting 1d6 damage with each.

In a group of more than eight dorvesh, there is a 60% chance that the clan chief will be with the group. The chief has 5 HD and is AC 4.

Habitat/Society: An average dorvesh clan numbers 80-120, 20% of them children and 20% females. Dorvesh females are skilled fighters who always fight beside the males if the homestead is attacked.

Dorvesh live in towns constructed around their mine entrances. Since dorvesh do not construct deep mines, they sometimes have to move to a new site. Though their settlements are well constructed, they are not permanent. Abandoned dorvesh settlements may occasionally be found in remote valleys, often inhabited by goblins or kobolds.

Dorvesh produce all their own metalwork. These items are sturdy and reliable, but they are less likely to be engraved or decorated than similar dwarven items. Dorvesh prefer the classic lines of an undecorated hammer, chisel, or axe. Dorvesh hoard precious metals and gems, gold being particularly prized.

Dorvesh are a stubborn and tenacious people, often considered deliberately obtuse by outsiders. Unlike their dwarven counterparts, dorvesh do not wage war against orcs, goblins, giants, or drow, preferring to remain detached from the other races.

Since dorvesh avoid contact with other races as much as possible, they speak only their own dialect of Dwarvish. Anyone who speaks Dwarvish has a 75% chance to understand the dorvesh dialect.

Ecology: though dorvesh are skilled miners and metalworkers, they rarely sell the goods they produce. Thus limited in commerce, they hunt for their own food and cultivate mushrooms and tubers to supplement their diets.

Dorvesh usually live from 150-200 years.

Ha'pony

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CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any temperate
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Community
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Day
DIET:	Omnivorous
INTELLIGENCE:	Average (8-10)
TREASURE:	M, (I)
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral good
NO. APPEARING:	2-8
ARMOR CLASS:	7
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	2+2
THAC0:	19
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-3
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	+3 with bows and slings
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (4 1/2-5′)
MORALE:	Steady (11-12)
XP VALUE:	Normal: 120 Mayor: 175

Ha'ponies have the upper body of a halfling combined with the lower body of a pony.

They have a weather-beaten complexion, with hair varying from sandy to dark brown. Their pony hindquarters are varying shades of brown and chestnut, with some grays. In most tribes, the mayor has a piebald coat.

Ha'ponies wear brightly colored shirts and tunics, and the majority braid their hair and tails with many-colored ribbons.

Combat: Ha'ponies are peace-loving creatures but will fight ferociously in defense of their homes and families. Like halflings, they are very skilled with both the sling and the bow, receiving a +3 bonus to attack rolls. Ha'ponies gain a +2 bonus on their saving throws vs. spells and poison due to the natural resistance shared with their halfling cousins.

Ha'ponies do not normally wear armor, but each village usually has a militia with 20-30 members who wear studded leather armor (jerkins and barding). In their villages, ha'ponies do not normally carry weapons, except for the militia. These stalwarts are usually armed with short swords and slings, or short swords and bows.

When outside the village, ha'ponies are usually armed with short swords or spears. In addition, 50% of the group is armed with slings or short bows. There is a 30% chance that a group outside a village will be militia on patrol.

The mayor very rarely (5%) leaves the village, but if so he or she will wear a chain mail vest and carry a short sword and short bow. The mayor has 3+2 HD, AC 5, and THAC0 17.

Ha'ponies possess infravision with a range of 30′.

Habitat/Society: Ha'pony villages usually number between 80 and 150 individuals. Of this number, 15% are children and 30% females. Ha'pony females do not normally fight, but if the village is threatened they will defend their homes and children with slings and daggers.

The village has a mayor, but most important decisions are made by a council of elders known as "The Circle of Oak." In extreme cases, the Circle can remove a mayor from office and exile the unfortunate.

Ha'ponies are a cheerful people who are briefly wary of outsiders. They take pleasure in simple crafts and in nature, but they do not have the great love of food which characterizes their halfling cousins.

Ha'ponies speak Halfling and Common.

Ecology: The main fare of a ha'pony is fruit, supplemented by cereals. They make up to 20 different varieties of bread, each village having its own specialty. Ha'ponies occasionally hunt game birds such as pheasant and partridge.

Ha'ponies have a life span of approximately 120 years. They live in small family clusters within the village community. They don't breed often, but once a child is born it is lovingly cared for and spoiled by all its relatives.

Gnoat

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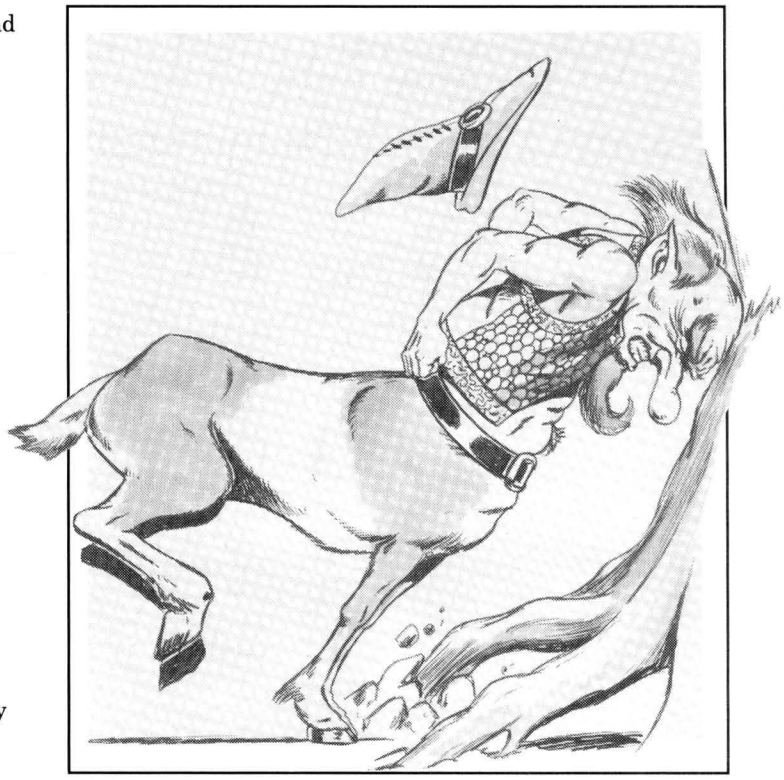
CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Temperate or tropical hills and mountains
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Clan
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Day
DIET:	Omnivorous
INTELLIGENCE:	Average (8-10)
TREASURE:	M, Q (I)
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	4-12
ARMOR CLASS:	6
MOVEMENT:	15
HIT DICE:	4+1
THAC0:	17
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-6 or by weapon type
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Nil
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	+4 save vs. spells and poison
SIZE:	L (5′ + tall)′)
MORALE:	Steady (12)
XP VALUE:	Normal: 420 Chief: 650 Illusionist: 650



Gnoats have the upper body of a gnome and the lower body of a large mountain goat.

Gnoats usually have brown skin, varying in shade from tan to a deep chestnut. The shaggy coat on their goat hindquarters also varies in color, being brown, black, or gray with a white or cream underside. Hair is the same color as the coat and is usually worn short by both males and females. Hooves are usually black or very dark brown.

Male gnoats have beards which match the coloration of their goat hindquarters. Beards are kept fairly short and often are trimmed to form elaborate designs. Most gnoats have blue eyes, ranging from light, cool shades to deep cobalt blue, but a few individuals have brown or green eyes.

Clothing usually consists of shirts and jackets of cotton or leather, and hats of various design. Gnoats tend to avoid very bright colors, but they do wear clothes of many differing shades. A favorite garment among gnoats is a patchwork jacket, with swatches of many different colors and materials. These jackets are very strongly constructed and act as padded armor. Jewelry, when worn, consists of carved wooden pendants and bracelets.

Combat: On the whole, gnoats are peaceful, although they are wary of strangers until they prove themselves worthy. Gnoats will defend themselves if attacked, and the majority of males are proficient with weapons. Females rarely fight unless directly threatened.

Gnoats are usually armed with spears or clubs, and at least half of any group carries short bows. If unarmed, gnoats will kick with their rear hooves. This single attack causes 1-6 points of damage.

Any group encountered may be the entourage of the clan chief and a 3rd-level illusionist (15% chance). If so, 2-8 additional gnoats accompany the group. The chief wears an elaborately decorated matching jacket and hat, and he carries a shield bearing the clan emblem. Typical emblems are horns, mountains, trees, or tools. The clan illusionist normally wears a plain black tunic and black leather skull cap.

Like gnomes, gnoats are resistant to spells and poison, receiving a +4 bonus to their saving throws.

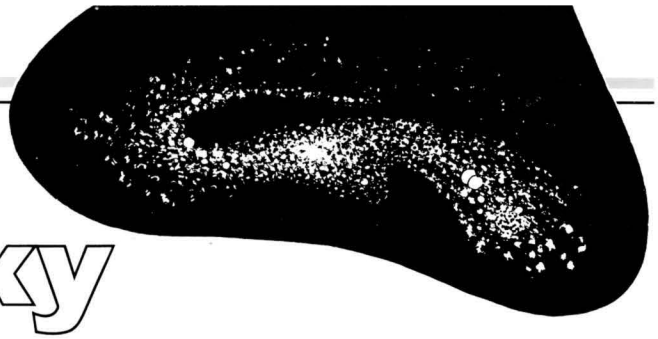
Habitat/Society: For most of the year, gnoat clans inhabit cave systems in the lower foothills of high mountain ranges. They spend their time hunting and farming in order to produce enough food for the winter. During the winter months, gnoats usually keep to caverns deep within the mountains, where they have stockpiles of grain, cured meat, and honey.

Gnoat clans have 100-300 members, of which 40% are females and 10% children. Each clan is led by a chief (5+1 HD, AC 5, THAC0 15) and advised by 1-4 illusionists of levels 1-3.

Gnoats speak Gnomish and Common. Many gnoats can communicate with burrowing mammals, but a few clans have lost this ability.

Ecology: Gnoats are excellent wood-carvers and sculptors of stone. During the winter months, they develop their arts and produce many wonderful pieces ranging from delicately carved wooden animals and fruits small enough to fit in the palm of one's hand, to bold stone statues larger than a full-sized gnoat.

Gnoats leave their warm caverns in spring and attempt to trade some of their sculptures for pottery, metalwork, and fabrics. They do not stray far from their homesteads but wait for traveling merchants to cross the passes in their mountain homes. The gnoats approach merchants cautiously at first, but gradually build firm friendships. Some traders keep the gnoats' whereabouts secret in return for a ready supply of beautiful carvings each spring.



The Living Galaxy

The Suns Of War—Military History And Science Fiction Campaigns

by Roger E. Moore

When I was in high school, history was one of my favorite subjects. I particularly liked military histories, stories of wars and how they were fought. I read of the battles of the Roman Empire, the British Empire, the American Civil War, World War I, World War II, and Vietnam. I read about the secret weapons of the Greek genius Archimedes of Syracuse, and I studied diagrams of the more modern secret weapons of the Third Reich in World War II and the American military in the Space Age. Midway, Hastings, Gettysburg, and Leningrad came to life as I turned the pages of my books.

I also read about war among the worlds of science fiction: *Starship Troopers,* by Robert A. Heinlein; *Tactics of Mistake,* by Gordon R. Dickson; *The Dragon Masters,* by Jack Vance; and *The Forever War,* by Joe Haldeman. Interstellar and interplanetary conflicts boiled in the tales of E. E. "Doc" Smith, Arthur C. Clarke, David Drake, Fred Saberhagen, and Frank Herbert. Klendathu, Kobold, the Stone Nebula, Sade-138, New Washington, Kultis, and other combat zones became as familiar to me as those in the history books.

As I read, however, I somehow got the idea that warfare in the future would be nothing at all like any war in the past or present, no more than Vietnam had anything to do with the Punic Wars. In every way, I thought futuristic warfare would be a new thing simply because the tools would be so much more advanced.

Since then, it has occurred to me that I was wrong.

"To be a successful soldier you must know history," wrote General George S. Patton III to his son, during the height of World War II. "What you must know is how man reacts. Weapons change but man who uses them changes not at all." In retrospect, General Patton's words apply equally well to the Game Master of any role playing game. To run a successful and realistic game campaign, particularly a military campaign, one must know how people react—and few sources teach us better than does history.

I've many times pointed out that the GM of a science fiction role playing game should make as much use of non-science fiction sources as possible in developing a game universe. Imagination is fueled by knowledge and experience. Just as you can create unique cities, countries, and individuals by basing them on real-life counterparts, you can do the same to generate a science-fiction campaign history, a context in which characters act out their roles, for good or ill.

In this column, we will do just this to create a science fiction war campaign and many of its component battles, usable in a number of science fiction roleplaying games, all from history books—and recent history at that.

The Pacific War Model

Military science fiction campaigns may be set up as long-playing roleplaying plots as chains of interlinked miniatures battles, or even as combinations of the two. However, whether you use the *Star Wars, Warhammer 40,000, BattleTech, Star Fleet Battles,* STAR FRONTIERS®, or *Silent Death* rules, military history can provide you with an enormous variety of scenarios and background material.

I think it's possible to take any historical conflict and translate it into a science fiction setting. Some wars work better in this respect than others, of course. The tactics of the Roman legions or British redcoats probably won't work very well when applied to troops in powered armor carrying missile launchers and laser rifles, but the personalities, politics, and tactical and strategic situations of the Roman invasion of Britain or the American Revolution could be easily adapted.

For the purposes of this article, let's select a war in which the tactics and tools, down to individual actions, are fairly modern and thus more applicable to science fiction miniatures or role-playing combat. The twentieth century has had no lack of war, and many possible military-campaign models from the last 90 years or so beckon to GMs.

While I was skipping through the list of possibilities, one stood out in my mind as particularly interesting from a science fiction war-gaming viewpoint: the Pacific theater of the Second World War. The Pacific War, as it is sometimes called, was a unique conflict carried out for the most part between two highly technological forces, each battling for control of heavily defended islands over an ocean many thousands of square miles in size.

Far-roving ships and planes were the dominant forms of transportation, and these also served as important combat vehicles. There were major land-based operations, of course—China, Burma, New Guinea, and the Philippines—but it's the "island war" character that stands out. You are certain to have heard some of the names of these battlefields: Pearl Harbor, Wake, Midway, Attu, Guadalcanal, Truk, Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. You may even have relatives who fought there themselves.

The "island war" aspect of the Pacific War struck me as similar to the situation facing two rival spacegoing powers competing over the resources of a limited number of asteroids, planets, or star systems. In my mind, ships and planes became spacecraft, the ocean became the sea of space itself, and the Pacific War campaign model for this article was born.

How Things Got Started

It may be that you don't really care about the reasons why two groups of powered-armor troops or fighter-style spacecraft became rivals on your tabletop. If you are running a one-night-only battle with miniatures, having a reason for the two sides to fight may be moot—they will fight because the players *want* them to fight.

In a long-term role-playing or miniatures military campaign, however, background details on how the war got started and for what reasons can be worked into many individual scenarios. If one side started the war to gain fuel resources, many scenarios might involve the capture or defense of fuel pumps, mines, and refineries. If one side wanted to gain the colonization and mineral rights to a newly discovered Earthlike world, ground battles could

range over a wide variety of terrains.

Adopting the Pacific War for a military campaign model provides many interesting "how it started" tidbits for use in individual scenarios and battles. Things did *not* begin with Pearl Harbor, as many Americans tend to think. In fact, the shooting phase of the Pacific War can be said to have begun in September 1931, 10 years earlier. The Japanese army in Manchuria manufactured an "incident" that gave it the excuse to attack and conquer that part of Asia, which was then made a puppet state of Japan and renamed Manchukuo. Later incidents led to the Sino-Japanese War, which started in July 1937 and continued through the rest of the Allied-Japanese conflict.

Again, however, this is only a part of the whole picture. America and Japan had actually regarded each other as potential rivals in the Pacific theater as early as the 1920s, with some foreseeing the possibility of war even earlier than that. (After the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, Japan was the only Asian rival the U.S. had.) Many nations had developed colonial empires in Asia—the United States had the Philippines; the British had Singapore, India, Australia, New Zealand, Borneo, Malaya, and Burma; France had Indochina; the Netherlands had the Dutch East Indies; and so on.

Japan saw no reason why it couldn't have its own colonial empire, too. In fact, its attacks in the Pacific War were largely directed against the colonies of Western countries. "Asia for the Asians," the Japanese war slogan went, and the Japanese were able early on to get the support of local colonial peoples to fight against the Western powers. This support faded when many Japanese proved to be just as bad as, if not worse than, the old European and American overlords.

Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and numerous other targets across the Pacific in December 1941, but relations with the U.S. had been deteriorating for a long time. Americans were infuriated with Japan's invasion of China, and sympathy for the Chinese was high. When Japan allied itself with the Axis powers of Europe, the U.S. and Britain began plans to work together in case of war. Japan gained control of French Indochina in July 1941, and in response the U.S. froze all Japanese assets and funds in the country. Gas and oil exports to Japan were also terminated. This was a terrible blow to Japan, which was at the time dependent on exports from the U.S. to keep the nation going.

At that point, Japan saw no other course but to prepare for war immediately. Being forced to import its steel and fossil fuels, Japan had long cast its eyes on resource-rich areas in southern Asia and China. If America and the rest of the world wanted to play hardball, Japan was willing to play hardball, too—and felt it had to, now. The "day of infamy" followed quickly thereafter.

This is only a brief description of how things "went bad," but it is not hard to see plenty of material that could be added to a long-term role-playing military campaign with mass-combat miniatures scenarios. Apply this basic plot line to two rival interplanetary or interstellar nations, and think of all the events that could be played out before the actual war starts. Tense political maneuvering, dangerous spy operations, merchants and military officers trying to second-guess future events—lots of good adventures can be built on this pre-war period.

Once the war in the Pacific began between America and Japan, it became a terrible fight to the finish. The following sections describe some of the types of major military actions that occurred, focusing on those of greatest interest to GMs.

Carrier Duels

Aircraft carriers came on their own during the Pacific War. The most valuable ships in the war, they were make the nuclei of huge naval task forces. Never before or since did opposing groups of carriers meet in actual combat. Carrier duels were characterized by extensive pre-battle searches for opponents by planes and submarines, often lasting for days; massive aerial assaults with torpedo bombers, dive bombers, and high-altitude bombers; and complete or partial destruction of huge ships from only one to three bombs apiece. Bad weather, faulty intelligence, night, sailor and pilot inexperience, poor equipment, and just plain bad luck injured both sides.

Five carrier duels took place during the Pacific War: Coral Sea, Midway, Eastern Solomons, Santa Cruz Islands, and the Philippine Sea. Midway is regarded as the most decisive battle, when Japanese expansion toward Hawaii was stopped with severe losses to their forces; Coral Sea was the second most important, when Japanese moves toward Australia and New Guinea were halted. The Battle of the Philippine Sea was the most massive carrier battle, involving two dozen carriers and over 1,300 aircraft on both sides.

Game Situation: A "big ship" military role-playing campaign, as outlined in this column in POLYHEDRON® Newszine issue #90 is called for here. The best Pacific War model for such a big ship would be the U.S.S. *Enterprise*, the only large American carrier to survive the entire war. It escaped the attack at Pearl Harbor, raided Japanese bases through 1942, then fought in every carrier duel but Coral Sea, taking terrible hits in two battles. It aided the Doolittle mission to raid Tokyo, and its pilots helped sink one of the largest battleships ever built, the *Musashi*.

It would be worthwhile to look up the details on the long career of the *Enterprise,* borrowing many of the incidents and battles in which it and its sister ships were involved for use in a game campaign. The "Battlestar Galactica" TV show and the *Azhanti High Lightning* boxed set for the early-edition *Traveller* game could also be mined for ideas, as each vessel carried fighter spacecraft like an aircraft carrier. TSR's STAR FRONTIERS game also had carriers, though no deck plans were made for them (you could make your own, of course).

Ship-To-Ship Actions

Before the Japanese and Americans went to war, both sides had assumed that any sea battle in the Pacific would be fought in pretty much the same way that surface navies had fought during World War I. But this turned out not to be the case, thanks to great advances in technology such as radar, aircraft carriers of various sizes, better torpedoes and submarines, and so forth. It was actually rare for either side to meet in full-scale, ship-to-ship gunnery exchanges, but naval actions did occur, and they were short, violent, and deadly.

Major battles fought during the war included the American raid on Balikpapan, the Japanese victory at Java Sea, the strikingly "World War I"-ish fight at Kormandorski Islands, the terrible Allied defeat at Savo Island, and the savage American victories at

Vella Gulf and Leyte Gulf. Of particular interest was the American revenge at Surigao Strait in the Philippines, where a half-dozen old American battleships (five of them salvaged from the wreckage at Pearl Harbor) and almost 40 other major ships caught a Japanese task force and blew it out of the water in 15 minutes.

Game Situation: Many science fiction board games have ship-to-ship battle rules and scenarios built into their campaigns (*Star Fleet Battles,* STAR FRONTIERS Knight Hawks, *Silent Death, Star Wars,* etc.). A look over the types of engagements fought in World War II provides some interesting fodder for tabletop miniatures gaming. The broad running battle at Leyte Gulf in the Philippines, during the American invasion of that Japanese-held island chain, is recommended as a model for anyone wishing to put large numbers of starships into play in a titanic strategic fight over a star system previously captured by the enemy. Playing out miniatures or role-playing scenarios based on the smaller conflicts in this operation, such as the landing of U.S. Army Rangers before the invasion to secure airfields, or the aerial attack on the gigantic battleship *Musashi*, would add additional excitement to the game.

Harbor Raids

Harbor raids were aerial bombing assaults against heavily defended naval harbors. The most famous of them all, of course, was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor at the start of America's involvement in the Pacific War. The Japanese also raided Darwin, in northern Australia, and the Allies raided numerous Japanese harbor cities. U.S. raids on Japan, however, were not as well opposed as attacks on Pacific strongholds such as Rabaul, on the island of New Britain, or Truk. Harbors were prime targets, with all their fuel and supply storage facilities, personnel barracks, docks, and the unmoving ships lying in the harbors themselves.

Pearl Harbor offers what seems to be the best template on which to base a game scenario; its fame (or infamy) is so great that there is no end of material on it. It was a surprise attack made with three waves of aircraft; it was a staggering victory but with surprising gaps in the attackers' achievements. (Supply and repair facilities were largely missed, and no aircraft carriers were present, which the Japanese had hoped to neutralize.) Though controversy rages over some political aspects of the attack, the actual events are quite clearly known and easy to duplicate.

Game Situation: A huge orbital space station with numerous docks comes under an intense, surprise assault from many small spacecraft launched by a large carrier some distance away. Docked spacecraft cannot usually move, but their weapons might be able to fire. This would be best played out as a large-area miniatures battle, perhaps with players taking command of groups of spacecraft or gun emplacements. In a role-playing campaign, this battle might last less than a day but will make a memorable impression.

Planes vs. Ships

Aircraft launched from carriers routinely battered enemy carriers, but they were not always very successful when attacking other types of ships. Dive bombers usually did well, and high-altitude bombers did the least damage (they kept missing). Still, fast and lightly armored aircraft with big bombs could do terrible harm.

At the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, Australian and American fighters and bombers caught a fleet of Japanese troop transports on the open sea, nearly destroying it. Allied aircraft acquitted themselves well at Leyte Gulf, too, as noted earlier.

Game Situation: Small fighter spacecraft exist in a number of science fiction games, and they could be added to most deep-space scenarios so long as carriers, space stations, or planetside spaceports are nearby. (World War II aircraft had long ranges but very short flying times, sometimes breaking off a winning battle to flee due to lack of fuel.) A moderately armed transport fleet passing near an enemy planet might find itself ambushed by scores of smaller craft, swarming over the slower-moving ships like hornets.

Island Landings

Battles for small islands during the war had many elements in common, even as they were each quite different from all the others. Whichever side held the island first dug in its defenses, using every trick in the book to survive the attack it knew would be coming; the other side poured on the firepower until it was ready to wade ashore into murderous fire from surviving defenders. It was a brutal, bitter sort of fight marked by heroism, savagery, and extreme casualties on all sides, a true war of attrition that had to be won time after time to bring about final victory.

The following is a partial list of the island battles which are both the most interesting and also the best candidates for inclusion in scenarios for science fiction campaigns: Wake, Singapore, Attu, Guadalcanal, New Georgia/Munda, Bougainville, New Britain, Tarawa, Makin, Kwajalein/Roi-Namur, Eniwetok, Los Negros, Wakde, Biak, Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.

Guadalcanal stands out in many ways as the best model for a long-playing campaign in a very limited area. This island was held at the same time by both Japanese and Americans, and the tales of the fighting there have grown into legends. The amphibious invasions and counter-invasions; the large number of bomber and fighter aircraft from carriers and island airbases; the no-quarter jungle fighting; the murderous naval bombardments; the devastating fleet-vs.-fleet battles; and the incredible problems with disease, weather, and low supplies that both sides suffered all combined to make this battle one that no survivor would never forget. A similar war zone in your campaign could be unforgettable, too.

Game Situation: A Moon-sized planet is the only large body in a strategically located star system between two giant interstellar empires. The airless, rough-surfaced world is invaded first by one side, then the other, and both begin a toe-to-toe, no-holds-barred slugging match over the world and its mineral resources. The local sun spews out flares and violent radiation; the world is rocked by quakes and volcanos; space fleets of either side bombard the surface night and day; supplies are low all around; and death is everywhere. But whichever side loses the world stands a good chance of losing the war, too.

This would make a better long-term roleplaying campaign than it would a miniatures battle or simple, one-night role-playing adventure. How long will the PCs survive on this hellworld, and how will they contribute to ultimate victory or defeat?

Jungle & Guerilla Warfare

Many of the island and mainland areas involved in the fighting were covered by dense tropical forests, which led to the creation of new tactics and the need for new equipment. Campaigns long or short can be centered around the tactics and strategy of jungle warfare, from amphibious landings and pillboxes to guerilla fighting and commando forces. The primary areas of World War II to study involve the battles on New Guinea (such as at Gona, Buna, and Sanananda), the Philippines (a huge area to cover), and Burma (look up Merrill's Marauders and the Kachin Rangers).

As a one-shot adventure, a quick shoot-'em-up commando raid against an island, asteroid, or planet held by the enemy would be quite exciting. Several such raids were made during the war by both sides, with the wild, one-night U.S. Marine raid against Choiseul being of special interest (call the adventure "Guerillas in the Mist").

The Philippines are especially interesting as the prototype of a broad campaign setting (from an American perspective). PCs could be involved in prewar activities such as preparing the setting's defenses, moving on to the active defense of the area (which might be deliberately set up to be extremely difficult at best), guerilla activities during the area's occupation, and eventually outside attempts to retake the area from the invader. A PC commander might find it interesting to be in the equivalent of General Douglas MacArthur's position: Could the PC do any better at defending his nearly indefensible territory in similar circumstances?

Game Situation: The PCs are high military officers placed in charge of defending a strategically located colony [illegible] than the colonial government now in charge. The PCs have little time in which to prepare, perhaps only a year; then the invasion starts. Can they win the local hearts and minds, then pull the world through? This long-playing campaign would find the answer.

The Long And The Short

The above material gives you only a little taste of the sort of campaign and adventure ideas that can be carefully pulled from the pages of recent history. A few other examples follow.

The Hard Times Division: Battered at Tarawa, Makin, and Eniwetok, the U.S. Army's 27th Division came ashore at Saipan and received a severe battering. Worse, the unit failed to function as an effective fighting force during the worst of the struggle, and bitter rivalry with the U.S. Marines darkened its achievements. If the PCs were placed in charge of a fighting force with similar troubles, could they weld it together as a real combat team in time for a major and dangerous operation?

The Peasant Armies: American advisors under the command of Major General Albert Wedemeyer were sent into China to train peasants to fight Japanese occupiers, hoping to drive Japan off the Asian continent entirely. However, the Chinese were divided between Communists and Nationalists, who hated each other with a passion, and the peasants had bad morale and were in terrible physical condition. The maddening struggle by PC officers to create an efficient army under such conditions would be worth a number of sessions of campaign play.

Escape from the Death March: Some servicemen managed to escape from the horrifying Bataan Death March in the Philippines, after the [illegible] an enemy commander, perhaps even the commander-in-chief? This would make an interesting, tense adventure.

What To Read For More

Against the backdrop of a vast, interstellar struggle, a thousand adventures can be played out. These have been only a few of them, and all are waiting for discovery in the pages of the nearest history book.

There are undoubtedly more books written about World War II (even just the Pacific theater part) than you could read in a lifetime. The following two are recommended as good, overall primers on the fight. Each suggests many other books that focus on particular areas of the fighting, such as Walter Lord's excellent *Incredible Victory,* about the Battle of Midway, or his equally excellent book on Pearl Harbor, *Day of Infamy.*

- Spector, Ronald H. *Eagle Against the Sun: the American War with Japan.* This excellent one-volume history of the Pacific War gives the American perspective on the conflict. Many aspects of the war are covered, including the reasons why it started; the personalities of the major figures involved; how advances in tactics, training, and technology affected battles; and special sections on espionage and code breaking, submarine and aerial warfare; how Americans reacted to foreign cultures (and vice versa), the role of blacks and women among American forces, and the vital place of logistics in a war theater (and what happens when you ignore it). The occasional focus on individual acts of heroism, cowardice, mercy, and cruelty make the war more real and personal.
- Toland, John. *The Rising Sun: The Rise and Fall of the Japanese Empire 1936-1945.* Historian Toland approaches the Pacific War from the Japanese [illegible]

Into The Dark

Lance Henriksen Theater

by James Lowder

Unless you're an aficionado of obscure horror films, you probably know Lance Henriksen only from his role as Bishop, the "synthetic person" in James Cameron's mega-hit, *Aliens*. The part of the selfless android is not the sort of character Henriksen typically gets to portray. You're far more likely to find him doing a turn as a merciless criminal (as in *Johnny Handsome* and the disappointing John Woo-directed action flick, *Hard Target*). Even when he plays someone on the right side of the law, as in *Dog Day Afternoon*, Henriksen is usually cast as a hard-hearted, steely-eyed sort.

It's not that Henriksen can't create a sympathetic character; his work in *Aliens* and *Pumpkinhead* proves that he can win audience sympathy. But in Hollywood, land of typecasting, producers and directors find it much easier to picture the harsh-featured actor as an experience-scarred tough guy. At one point, he was the front runner for the role of the Terminator in the sf classic of the same name, but the producers decided upon Arnold Schwarzenegger for his name's marquis value.

The movies reviewed this time around should give you a good idea of Henriksen's talents. In a superior film like *Aliens*, he can shine, and even mired in a dreary waste-of-tape like *The Horror Show*, he can somehow manage to keep his dignity.

You can't get any better	*****
Entertaining and enjoyable	****
There are worse films	***
Wait for cable	**
A waste of good tape	*

Nightmares

1983, 99 Minutes
Universal/MCA
Director: Jose Sargent
Cast: Cristina Raines, Emilio Estevez, Lance Henriksen, Richard Masur, Veronica Cartwright
**** 1/2**

Originally conceived and filmed as the pilot for a "Twilight Zone"-style television series, *Nightmares* found itself propelled to feature status by the short-sighted folks at Universal. It's a presentable enough telefilm, but hardly worthy of big-screen release.

Nightmares is made up of four unconnected episodes, without any sort of framing device or narrator to link them. The first, second, and fourth chapters are, at best, adequate. "Terror in Topanga" features a nicotine addict (Cristina Raines) who ventures out for cigarettes on the night a maniac escapes from a mental institution; the story never manages to rise much above the level of any one of a dozen old campfire tales—the ones about the Hook Killer of Lover's Lane and the like—you'd tell to scare your younger brother.

In "The Bishop of Battle," a video game-playing mall rat (Emilio Estevez) pays the price for finally reaching the mysterious 13th level of his favorite arcade game. No surprises here, either. *The Last Starfighter* covered much of the same territory, with a better sense of humor.

The last entry, "Night of the Rat," is the worst. A gigantic "Devil Rodent" invades the home of soulless yuppie workaholic Richard Masur, supposedly because he's so evil. But the writers seem to forget that crucial bit of monster motivation in the piece's clumsy resolution, which also sports some truly *cheesy* special effects. (Sorry, I couldn't help myself).

That leaves the third vignette to pull *Nightmares* out of contention for a Sleeping Pill award; it nearly succeeds. In "The Benediction," Lance Henriksen plays a priest who abandons his parish and his faith after the death of a little boy. On his journey across the desert in a beat up car, he's challenged by a black pick-up of possibly infernal origins. The storytelling here is much more compelling, Henriksen succeeds in conveying the priest's anguish without wandering into melodrama. Like the rest of the entries in *Nightmares*, the "twist" ending of "The Benediction" isn't much of a twist. Still, I watched this segment twice, when I could barely keep my eyes on the TV the first time through the other three.

Aliens

1986, 138 Minutes
20th Century Fox
Director: James Cameron
Cast: Sigourney Weaver, Michael Biehn, Paul Reiser, Lance Henriksen
******1/2**

The only real flaw in James Cameron's Academy Award-winning sf-adventure blockbuster *Aliens* is that it doesn't know when to quit.

After 57 years, Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), the sole survivor of the Alien-devoured crew from the first film, awakes from hibernation only to discover that terraformers have returned to the dread planet and unknowingly stumbled into the Alien's nest. Prompted by her own nightmares of the Aliens, Ripley agrees to accompany a troupe of Space Marines to the planet for a quick little search, rescue, and exterminate operation. Well, that's the plan anyway. In fact, the "bughunt" turns against the Marines. Ripley finds herself battling to survive in the ravaged colony along with an ever-dwindling group of Marines and a corporate scum named Burke (Paul Reiser), who's really after the Aliens for their possible bio-military applications.

The cast is uniformly excellent, and director Cameron spends the first half hour expertly defining the various Marines. It's to the cast's credit that they hold their own against the special effects and action sequences throughout much of the film, managing not to be overshadowed by the pyrotechnics. (That's not to say the FX aren't dazzling; *Aliens* more than deserves the two technical Oscars it garnered—one for Best Special Effects, one for Best Sound.) But the FX have a thousand times the impact because of the characters—Lance Henriksen as the selfless android Bishop; Bill Paxton as the doomsaying Marine grunt, Hudson ("That's it, man. Game over!"); and Jenette Goldstein as the well-muscled Private Vasquez.

But Cameron, not content with a solid hour and a half or even two hours of action, couldn't stop himself, even after

he'd wiped out or immobilized all but Ripley. It's in the last 40 minutes, during Ripley's one-woman battle against the brood queen, that the viewer gets numb. Here, the film sports no less than three cliffhanger endings—the rescue of Newt in the egg chamber; the escape from the planet; and the over-the-top slugfest between Ripley and the Alien queen in the loading bay. Hey, roller coasters are fun, but after two and a half hours on Space Mountain, the exhilaration would wear off.

Cameron started his career as an art director and production designer on such schlock classics as *Battle Beyond the Stars* and *Galaxy of Terror*, and his first directing stint was on the laughable *Piranha II: The Spawning* (touted as the best flying piranha movie ever made). Some of the supporting cast in *Aliens* are regulars in Cameron films. Michael Biehn and Bill Paxton appear in *The Terminator*, and Biehn also showed up in *The Abyss*. Henriksen goes all the way back to Cameron's debut, starring in *Piranha II*. Henriksen has a screenwriter's credit for *The Terminator*, in which he also appears.

Near Dark

1987, 95 Minutes
HBO
Director: Kathryn Bigelow
Cast: Adrian Pasdar, Jenny Wright, Lance Henriksen
****

After working with James Cameron on three films—*Piranha II*, *The Terminator*, and *Aliens*—Lance Henriksen found himself working on a picture directed by Kathryn Bigelow, Cameron's wife.

Near Dark is a superior modern-day vampire tale set in the Southwest. One night in Oklahoma, Caleb (Adrian Pasdar) meets up with a pretty young woman named Mae (Jenny Wright). What he doesn't discover until it's much too late is that Mae is a vampire, part of a frightening undead troupe that travels the country in stolen cars, preying upon people, then moving on.

Mae draws Caleb into this troupe, much to the chagrin of her fellow vampires. The leader of the band, Jessie (Lance Henriksen), has been wandering since the Civil War. His mistress is a knife-toting woman named Diamondback (Jenette Goldstein), and apart from Mae, their wards include the redneck maniac Severin (Bill Paxton) and young Homer (Joshua Miller), whose child's body holds a corrupt and lustful soul. (If most of those actors sound familiar, they should. Check out the cast list for *Aliens*. Sort of a Space Marine reunion.)

The heart of the film, and its most original moments, center on the vampire troupe's ecology—how they obtain cars, resting places, and victims. Each of the night stalkers has a different style, but together they work as a frightening, almost clockwork killing machine. Their world is one of 24-hour truck stops and seedy bars, abandoned warehouses and run-down motels. And though that world is not so far removed from the daytime existence of most of us, Bigelow infuses it with a mystery and desolation that make it seem as distant as the dark side of the moon.

The film's conclusion and the near-miraculous salvation of the hero is something of a let-down, and the final confrontation with Jesse and Company could have been staged better. But if you're looking for a vampire flick that doesn't contain the usual high-necked cloaks and stage fangs, *Near Dark* is for you.

Pumpkinhead

1988, 87 Minutes
MGM/UA
Director: Stan Winston
Cast: Lance Henriksen, Jeff East, Cynthia Bain
****

Pumpkinhead marked the directorial debut of special-effects master Stan Winston. And for the lead in his first film, he chose a veteran of his days working on such James Cameron triumphs as *The Terminator* and *Aliens*—Lance Henriksen.

At first glance, *Pumpkinhead* may seem like yet another Creature Feature in which a group of nameless teens get bumped off in Ten Little Indians fashion by the most recent escapee from the local mental institution, toxic dump, or game design company. In fact, it is a carefully constructed and solidly crafted refutation of all those films. The "virgin teens live, everybody else gets an axe in the head" philosophy doesn't hold here.

When his young son is killed by reckless "city folk" on motorbikes, Ed Harley (Lance Henriksen) goes to a witch in the wilds of Appalachia and asks her to resurrect Pumpkinhead, a demon of vengeance, to stalk and slay the seemingly remorseless kids. Not knowing what's on the way, the kids decide that they must make amends for their actions. Oops, too late—and too late for Ed Harley, as well. Seems that he's linked to Pumpkinhead and has to witness each murder, even after he decides he was wrong.

As you would expect from a Stan Winston film, the special effects are very solid, but the acting and cinematography stand out, too. Henriksen is superb a s the grief-tortured (and demon-tortured) father. Watch for John DiAquino of TV's "SeaQuest" as the obnoxious jerk who starts all the trouble.

The Horror Show

1989, 95 Minutes
MGM/UA
Director: James Isaac
Cast: Lance Henriksen, Brion James
1/2

If it weren't for Lance Henriksen, there'd be no reason to watch *The Horror Show*. And since there are better Lance Henriksen films to watch, you should never have to bother renting this awful film.

Henriksen plays a police detective who is plagued by the electronic ghost of mass murderer "Meat Cleaver" Max Jenke (Brion James). The Freddie Kruger-like murderer possesses the furnace in the detective's home. (Don't you hate it when that happens?) and terrorizes his family. Apart from the fake scares—cats jumping out of cupboards and the like—there'd be no scares at all. The film makers might have intended "Meat Cleaver" Max's exploits to invoke fear, but they merely cause disgust.

Sean S. Cunningham, the man behind all those *Friday the 13th* films, produced. Outside the U.S., *The Horror Show* is known as *House III*. (Cunningham is also the producer of the *House* series.) Under any name, it's an utter waste of time.

The script for *The Horror Show* is credited to Leslie Bohem and Alan Smithee. The latter is the pseudonym film people slap on a project they're too embarrassed to put their real name on. Whoever opted to hide his identity exercised the only bit of good judgment I can ferret out about this time-waster.

RAVENS BLUFF™

CHARACTER CENSUS ENROLLMENT

Player: _____ Network#: _____

Address: _____ Player Level: _____

City: _____ State/ZIP: _____

Hero: _____ **Titles:** _____

Alignment | Level | Gender | Clan/Race | Class/Kit

ABILITIES

	Hit Adj	Dmg Adj	Wt Load	Max Lift	Open Doors	Bend &Lift
STR						

	Surprise Adj	Missile Adj	AC Adj	Save Adj
DEX				
CON	Hit Pt Adj	System Shock	Ressurect Survival	Hold Breath

	# of Lang.	Highest Spell Lvl	Learn Spell	Max # Spells/Lvl
INT				

	Mental Save Adj	Bonus Priest Spells 1- 2- 3- 4-	Spell Failure
WIS			

	Number of Henchmen	Loyalty Base	Response Adj
CHR			

	Response Notes
CMS	

MOVEMENT

BASE RATE _____

INSIDE x10 FT _____ OUTSIDE x10 YD _____

JOG†	= x2	MARCH	= x2 MI
RUN†	= x3 S	FORCED	= +.5 MI
RACE†	= x4 S -4	SWIM†	= x____
SPRINT†	= x5 S -8		

† CON CHECK / RD

Encumbrance

		LIGHT	= x2/3
HAZARD	= x1/3	MEDIUM	= x1/2
CRAWL	= x1/4	HEAVY	= x1/3
CLIMB	= x1 FT	MAX	= x1 FT

SAVES

MODIFIERS	ADJ.		
		PARALYZE, POISON, DEATH MAGIC	☐
		ROD,STAFF, OR WAND	☐
		PETRIFY OR POLYMORPH	☐
		BREATH WEAPON	☐
		MAGIC SPELLS	☐

Special Saves: _____

SPECIAL ABILITIES

(Racial & Kit **Benefits, Hindrances, Detections, Resistance, Vision, etc**)

SPELLS

1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th

PROFICIENCIES

INITIAL Wpn/Non #	NEW / # LEVELS New / # Lvls	Unskilled Penalty
/	/	
		(/)
		(/)
		(/)
		(/)
		(/)
		(/)
		(/)
		(/)
		(/)
		(/)
		(/)
		(/)
		(/)

COMBAT

To Hit AC 0 "THAC0"

WEAPON	SPEED	LENGTH	ENC.	HIT ADJ	THAC0	#AT	RANGE	DMG (S-M/L)	ADJ	SPECIALS / MANEUVERS

SPECIAL ATTACKS: _____

AMMUNITION: _____

MOUNT/HENCHMAN	LVL/HD	RACE/CLASS	STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHR	CMS	AC	THAC0	ADJ	WEAPON	DMG(S-M / L)	ADJ	RANGES	SPCL

ARMOR

AC

MODIFIED AC	ARMOR	AC ADJ	ARMOR	AC ADJ
SURPRISE				
NO SHIELD				
REAR				

SPECIAL DEFENSES: _____

HIT POINTS

WOUNDS:

1D10 HIT POINTS / LEVEL

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ABILITIES

STR INT
DEX WIS
CON CHR
CMS

Hero: _____ Titles: _____

Alignment | Level | Gender | Clan/Race | Class/Kit

Hometown | Nation | Patron / Liege | Religion

Experience Points

Next Level XP:

DESCRIPTION

Age: _____ Apparent Age: _____
Gender: _____ Race: _____ Height: _____ Weight: _____
Build: _____ Handedness: _____
Skin Hue: _____ Eye Color: _____
Hair Color: _____ Hair Style: _____
Appearance: _____

PERSONALITY (Attitudes, Personality, Passions, Virtues & Vices)

THIEVING ABILITIES

Backstab Damage _____

Pick Pockets	_____	Open Locks	_____
Find/Remove Traps	_____	Move Silently	_____
Hide in Shadows	_____	Detect Noise	_____
Climb	_____	Read Languages	_____

TURNING EVIL AND ENCHANTED CREATURES

Skeleton or 1 HD	_____	Zombie	_____	Ghoul or 2 HD	_____
Shadow or 3-4 HD	_____	Wight or 5 HD	_____	Ghast	_____
Wraith or 6 HD	_____	Mummy or 7 HD	_____	Spectre or 8 HD	_____
Vampire or 9 HD	_____	Ghost or 10 HD	_____	Lich or 11+ HD	_____
Special/Otherworld	_____				

GEAR & MAGIC ITEMS

LEFT SIDE

ITEM	LOCATION	ENC.

CENTER OR BACK

ITEM	LOCATION	ENC.

RIGHT SIDE

ITEM	LOCATION	ENC.

GEAR IN STORAGE

ITEM	LOCATION	ENC.	PROTECTION

SUPPLIES

RATIONS
FEED
TORCHES
WATER / WINE
OTHER
OTHER

WEALTH:

COPPER
SILVER
GOLD
ELECTRUM
PLATINUM
OTHER

GEMS & JEWELS

LOCATION _____

ITEM	VALUE

TREASURES IN STORAGE:

PROTECTIONS: _____

ITEM	LOCATION	VALUE

PROTECTIONS: _____

ITEM	LOCATION	VALUE

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